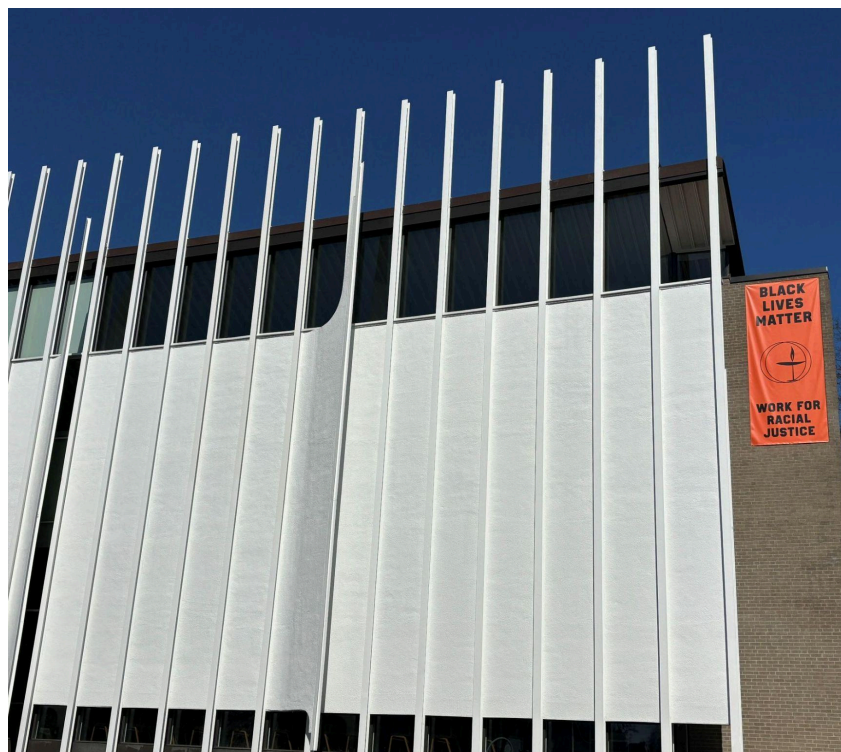


# Annual Report Church Year 2024-25



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## 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

Joetta Prost, President of the Board of Trustees

It has been a real pleasure to serve as the president of St. John's Board of Trustees this year and I'm grateful to have an opportunity now to share about the work of your elected congregational leaders. I begin by noting that working alongside Rev. Jenn Gracen has been such a blessing for the Board and we are grateful for the skills she brings to St. John's as an accredited interim minister. And my colleagues on the board have been awesome partners this year.

Before offering highlights from the work of the Board this year, it seems important to reflect on how we did our work. This year your board members and Rev. Jenn paid close attention to how we work with each other and with the congregation. We've caught ourselves a few times when we made mistakes in our shared ministry efforts and we've grown together, taking time to recognize St. John's past challenges and simultaneously look to the future for our congregation.

After a challenging transition like St. John's experienced in 2023, it is helpful to recognize when we experience a healthier situation - what I have come to identify as having a 'reset.' Such resets can be large or small. One simple reset this year: we had a full board of seven members for the first time in two years. Here's another one: some church members will likely recall times in the past when serving on the Board was very difficult. While serving in leadership can be challenging at times, the reset this year is that committing time and energy as a congregational leader can be fulfilling and even uplifting when the work takes place with a sense of shared ministry and a respectful spirit.

Throughout the year, board members and Rev. Jenn centered [our covenant](#), reading it aloud at the start of each meeting and reflecting at the conclusion of the meeting on how well we honored our agreement. This covenant among board members and the minister was initially adopted by board members in May 2023, in collaboration with the Rev. Alice Diebel. One of the board's goals this year has been the development of a congregational covenant that can help guide us all to be our better selves; the Board appointed Melissa Rowland and several St. John's members to a newly created Covenant Development Committee and you can see their update elsewhere in this Annual Report. We envision adopting a St. John's Covenant in the coming church year, along with a 'right relations' process to support healthy

communication and healthy relationships. I hope you'll get involved with this process - it's a 'reset' for how we can relate with each other within our caring community!

Another key to our success as a board this year has been making sure that we take sufficient time to prepare for and make important decisions. Sometimes we needed to slow down in order to ensure that all necessary information was gathered and that board members had adequate opportunity to reflect upon the issues. Having two board meetings most months allowed more "breathing" time to do the necessary work with less urgency.

One reset that began in the previous year and continued this year is a focus on transparency about the Board's work. We are grateful that some St. John's members have joined our meetings via Zoom and we hope members have appreciated the detailed reports in the enews following each board meeting. The two "Big Discussions" about the Both/And Team's work and the five conversations about selection of a future minister have been well-attended, reflecting that St. John's members and friends are very engaged in the important work of planning our future.

Looking back and looking forward have both been important for this year. Recognizing where we've been as a congregation has helped us think about how to move forward.

What has the Board accomplished this year? Here are some of the noteworthy board actions during the 2024-2025 year:

- Launched the [Both/And Team](#) to examine how St. John's can complete both the improvements envisioned in the Master Plan/Capital Campaign and address long-standing deferred maintenance needs, with responsible use of our financial resources. The resultant [Both/And Strategic Plan](#) will be voted on during the June 1 congregational meeting. In conjunction with this, the board voted to launch a capital campaign second ask to raise additional funds for the Both/And projects and authorized an appraisal of some of our artwork.
- Researched ministry options for St. John's following Rev. Jenn's completion of interim ministry in Aug. 2026, and prepared a [Plan for Ministry Selection](#) for the congregation's approval.
- Developed a deeper understanding of how congregational systems function and how past misconduct by minister, staff or members can have a lingering impact on congregational trust and interpersonal relationships.
- Created a [calendar](#) for tracking board and minister responsibilities throughout the year to ensure that annual and periodic events/tasks are planned and completed in a timely (and less stressful) manner.
- Reviewed St. John's bylaws to identify updates needed in the future, utilizing UUA best practices for reference.
- Achieved a number of key operational improvements including obtaining new liability insurance, initiating the annual review of the Minister's Discretionary Fund, moving our banking to a more efficient and advantageous arrangement, examining liability risk reduction for rentals of our building, reviewing split-the-plate procedures, improving the background check process, and establishing an annual review of staff benefits with guidance from the UUA.
- Supported Rev. Jenn in her role as supervisor of staff, trusting her guidance about staff roles, responsibilities and job descriptions.
- Utilized Rev. Jenn's recommendation of contracting with a consultant to help refresh our programming for children and families in advance of hiring our new program director.
- Used a team model for leadership with president, vice-president and minister meeting weekly to coordinate activities, plans and goals.

- Promoted a healthy balanced relationship between lay leaders and the minister.

If you have a memory of past leadership experiences and are open to a 'reset' of your expectations, I encourage you to recognize that now is a great time to get involved in various leadership roles within St. John's. Things are moving forward in so many positive ways at St. John's! Thanks for all the ways that you support our beloved community.

## Ministry and Worship

### Minister's Report

Rev. Jenn Gracen, Interim Minister

As we close the second year of our interim period together, it is time to reflect on the 2024–2025 church year. St. John's continues to impress me with the resilience, strength, and adaptability of this congregation. Over the past year, we have engaged deeply in transitional work and in living our values in community with one another.

We have experienced significant loss with the passing of Barbara Hadden, Mira Rodwan, Charles Siebert, and former St. John's minister Rev. Frank Carpenter. Each of these individuals left a unique mark on our community, and we have come together to honor their lives. In June, we will gather to celebrate Charles Siebert.

**Worship** remains the heart of our congregational life—the time when the greatest number of us gather. This year, we continued to explore theme-based ministry, using monthly themes—**invitation, deep listening, repair, presence, story, inclusion, trust, joy, imagination, and freedom**—to reflect on our lives and the world around us. We also made modest adjustments to the structure of worship, including experimenting with greeting one another near the end of the service and consistently using the same song to bless one another after the story for all ages. We have an excellent music program as part of our worship services.

At times, our services incorporated more interactive elements, including using Legos during our covenant service and community weaving during the pledge campaign. Through worship, we lived our values—blessing and hanging both a Black Lives Matter banner and a Pride banner as expressions of our shared identity.

We also collaborated with other congregations throughout the year, hosting visiting ministers and participating in a joint service with the city's three largest congregations. This summer, we will once again share services with First Unitarian, continuing the pattern established last July.

**Staffing** was a central focus again this year, especially in the area of religious education. For much of the year, we were without a Director for the Children and Families program. In October 2024, we engaged Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao as a consultant. She met with families, helped us implement sustainable systems, and organized a "Big Conversation" that led to the formation of new small groups and renewed energy around offering *Our Whole Lives* in the city.

In February, we welcomed **Preston Riegel** as our new Program Director for Children and Youth. Preston brings fresh ideas and deep dedication to the role. Already, we're seeing signs of revitalization: the

Action Sunday group is planning an interactive service for early July, and the citywide OWL training will take place the weekend of June 6–8.

As a congregation, we have leaned into deep listening. In the fall, Melissa and I took a course on hosting Listening Circles. We then facilitated three circles focused on the questions:

- How has church fulfilled you in the past year?
- How are you staying engaged with the community today?
- What do you hope for our community in the future, and how will you take part in it?

The responses provided the Board and me with valuable insights and guidance for future opportunities and connection. We had originally planned to hold a second round of listening circles this spring, and instead focused on discussions about the congregation's future ministry, giving congregants an opportunity to discuss what comes next.

The **Covenant Development Team**, formed in response to the 2023 Listening Circles, has done outstanding work. They've offered multiple opportunities for members to share their perspectives and have guided us in shaping a congregational covenant that reflects our shared aspirations.

Since October, the **Board** has organized more than half a dozen **Both/And Conversations**. These gatherings brought together diverse voices from the congregation to discuss both regular building maintenance and the future direction of the capital campaign. Decisions about next steps will be made at our upcoming Annual Congregational Meeting.

Throughout the year, we've created multiple opportunities for **connection and faith formation**, including:

- Two *UU 101/New to UU* classes
- A book study of *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder
- Post-election discussion sessions in late 2024
- A hugely successful **No Talent Necessary Talent Show**, hosted by the Spirit Connection Team

At its core, this congregation is committed to showing up for one another—in friendship, in support, and in shared growth.

I look forward to another year of ministry with you. It is a joy and an honor to walk with this community as you discern your future and continue shaping who you want to be together. We will keep building on the strength and resilience of St. John's, and I have full confidence in its future.

## Children and Youth Programs

Preston Reigel, Director of Children and Youth Programs

For more than a year, St. John's was without a dedicated staff member to lead our ministry with children and families. In October 2024, we contracted with Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao, a professional with over 22 years of experience in direct ministry with children and families. Rev. Gerfao brought essential stability to the program, reestablishing foundational structures such as attendance tracking, registration procedures, and regular communication with families. She also met individually with each family to understand their experiences and gather insights about the

program's future.

Rev. Gerfao's work with St. John's culminated in a community-wide meeting on January 26, 2025, which drew 57 participants. Families engaged in rich conversations about family life, church involvement, and connections within the wider community, while other members of the congregation observed and listened. From this gathering, we identified a clear set of needs and formed several working groups to support initiatives such as Action Sunday and community service activities. One of the most significant outcomes was a strong mandate to restart the citywide Our Whole Lives (OWL) program. The first facilitator training is scheduled for June 6–8, 2025.

In February 2025, we were pleased to welcome Preston Riegel as our new Program Director for Children and Youth. Their leadership marks the beginning of a new chapter in our commitment to nurturing the spiritual lives of our youngest members and their families.

Since Preston's arrival, attendance is growing, and we now have a way to fully track this consistently moving forward. We will not be running a formal curriculum during summer months as of right now. August 20th marks the first day of classes for Cincinnati public schools. As such, the current plan moving forward is to launch a UU history curriculum beginning on the following Sunday. The curriculum will cover the advent and history of the faith, regional importance, and significant figures, as well as current events and recent changes for the older kids.

Younger students will receive a short introduction to the person or event before being released to open play, older students (middle and above) will be provided with a full lesson where possible. Lessons will be chiefly discussion focused, though this will be less apparent with the UU history curriculum. This curriculum is running for the purpose of facilitating a deeper connection between St. Johns and First UU, as it would allow for seamless integration of our childcare programs, even at a high level.

High level engagement at the moment should mostly be done via student consultation and guided but self-directed learning. Preston will serve as a resource for kids with motivation to pursue more academic learning or broaden and deepen their faith development. This will result in eventual growth for our older classes, which will hopefully turn into a structured environment for middle and high schoolers.

Action Sunday was successful for the kids, so this will continue moving forward, as it also seems to be getting the most attention and interest from our primary volunteer groups.

OWL is progressing well. Training to take place on Jun 6-8 and the final programming will launch with or slightly before our UU history curriculum. Sadly, Preston will be unable to participate in the facilitator training due to other professional commitments, but will be present in the morning to coordinate volunteers.

## Worship Arts Team

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

The Worship Arts Team works in collaboration with the minister, music staff, and AV staff to plan and support worship services throughout the year.



Over the past year, the Team has explored several adjustments to our standard order of service. The chalice lighting now changes nearly every week, bringing fresh voices and perspectives into our worship. We've also introduced a practice of using the same opening song for an entire month. This approach has helped congregants—especially children—become more familiar with new music and feel more connected to the service. In a similar spirit, we now close the story for all ages with the same song each week.

Another recent addition has been a time for greeting neighbors during the service, which has been well received and supports a spirit of community and connection.

While the Team currently does not have a chair, we are seeking a chair or co-chair team to help lead this important work.

The Team has decided to develop, in collaboration with the minister, a set of resource documents for worship associates. These materials will support the planning and leading of services, particularly when Rev. Jenn is not in the pulpit.

Throughout the year, we have used the ***Soul Matters*** themes to guide the focus of worship. We have also invited outside speakers to lead services on occasion, offering the congregation a diversity of perspectives and voices.

We look forward to another year of creative, meaningful, and collaborative worship.

## 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 Stephen's great support as accompanist. We continued to provide beautiful music on two or three Sundays a month (from September through May) as well as two choral services, one in December and one in May. We were able to feature a wide variety of great choral pieces thanks to Rob's purchase of several new anthems and his use of music in the choir library. Our anthems included two original compositions by Stephen. We also worked to select pieces that added to the monthly theme and weekly sermons.

In addition to preparing anthems for church services, we . . .

Held a pizza party at the start of the choir year to celebrate coming back together and to attract new members. From this activity as well as others, we acquired several new members. At present, the choir has 30 active members. Thanks to support from the music fund, Rob has purchased folders for new/future members.

Had a day-long retreat in October to start preparing music for the December choral service. The retreat was held at The Gathering at Northern Hills, with the expenses covered by the Schwab Music Fund. We also had a Saturday "retreat" at St. John's to work on our spring choral music.



Gathered to sing for Barbara Hadden at her son and daughter-in-law's home in December. We also sang for about 20 residents, including St. John's member Nikki Orlemann, at Ohio Living Llanfair in April. For this latter event, Rob and Randy prepared folders of music that can be used for future outreach performances.

Supported the production of Stephen's wonderful opera ***Forward into Light*** by supplying singers for the chorus and helping to provide food for the reception. This event was funded by the Schwab Music Fund.

Continued to organize the extensive music library, including putting all music in separate white filing boxes. Randy, who did the lion's share of this work, has become Chief Librarian, with Emily Hodges as an assistant. A big thank-you to both.

Looking forward, we will continue to have the pianos tuned as needed. We hope to sing at even more outreach events. And we hope to make more use of the music fund and the guest-musician allowance by gaining approval to put Stephen in charge of these activities as an Assistant Director of Music. Stephen would also join the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries.

It has been a great year of making music, and we feel very blessed to have been able to contribute to St. John's in these ways.

## Adult Faith Formation Team

Pete Asman and Diana Long, Co-Chairs

The 2024-25 year was quite productive for the team. Below is a list of what we were able to accomplish

We ran monthly Forums from September through May. Attendance averaged 12-15 people and speakers covered a wide range of topics. Forum Topics included:

Sep 1 Found House, Stacey Burge, Executive Director  
Oct 6 Supreme Court 2023-24, Howard Tolley  
Nov 3 What's on your Ballot? League of Women Voters of the Cincinnati Area, Claire Wagner  
Dec 1 Last Mile Food Rescue, Erin Lord, Volunteer Coordinator; Ellen Stedtefeld, Director of Projects  
Jan 5 The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), (weather cancellation)  
Feb 2 Unitarian Universalist Ministry, Rev. Jen Gracen  
Mar 2 Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC). Bob Lamb  
Apr 6 "A Smart Trash Program for Cincinnati: Why do we need it?", Bob Gedert, former president of National Recycling Coalition

Logistics of scheduling speakers has been challenging with numerous changes/weather cancellations. We will be exploring ways to make the process easier for next year.

We expanded Chalice Groups from three to five groups, two of which met in person. We increased the number of participants from 26 to 40 and added two new facilitators. Rev. Gracen created the curriculum and led monthly meetings with the facilitators.

We co-facilitated an 8 week series "Building the World We Dream About" open to UUs throughout the region, and more. We created new sessions for the series to cover systematic racism in the justice system, reconciliation, and reparations.

# 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 consist of equity funds, bonds, and cash. The overall valuations of those combined accounts rose by 2.0% this year. In fiscal year 2025, we disbursed \$9,116 in endowment funds and used \$3,203 in cash reserves to support several major projects that included: replacing the kitchen refrigerator, tree trimming, one time special maintenance, and music event support. We have received 871,981 in capital campaign pledges of \$1,018,483. Of the 871,981, we have spent 583,363 on the sanctuary wall. We have a current balance of 288,619.

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 are exceeding our income expectations by 5.77%. Total expenses are 3.45% less than the budget to date.

Income items of note: Pledge contributions received remain on budgeted target. We've also received more than we expected from past pledges outstanding. The St. John's auction proceeds are slightly less than expected (we budgeted \$9,000; we have received \$8,422 as of this report with several hundred dollars in receivables. Last summer's yard sale brought in more than expected. Total income stands at 89.1% through 10 months of the fiscal year with year-end actuals expected to slightly exceed the total budget.

Expense items of note: Personnel expenses are under budget. Our DRE position was unfilled until February. Our AV coordinator, music accompanist, and childcare assistance costs have been slightly less than expected. Office admin; music director, and custodian costs are on budget. Categories experiencing higher than anticipated costs include: legal fees; property insurance; and payroll. Insurance costs rose dramatically this year but should remain stable over the next two years. The church experienced a one-time costly legal issue that has been resolved. And property reserves will help to defray higher than expected repairs.

The bottom line: As of April 30, 2025, net income from operations stands at \$31,502, This includes \$22,321 in cash reserves. Without cash reserves, net income from operations = \$9,181.

## Financial Statements Summary

<b>Fund Balances</b>	04/30/2025	06/30/2024	Difference
Operations Account [Fifth Third]	\$398,607	\$288,062	\$110,545
Securities Account [Fifth Third]	\$85,563	\$81,004	\$4,559
Union Savings CDs and Savings	\$63,460	\$62,066	\$1,394
Legacy Endowment Fund	\$297,747	\$293,480	\$4,267
Miller-Lorentz Property Endowment Fund	\$260,512	\$253,279	\$7,233
Music Endowment Fund	\$121,035	\$122,258	(\$1,222)
<b>Total Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$1,226,925</b>	<b>\$1,100,150</b>	<b>\$126,776</b>
<b>Income and Expenses (Operations)</b>	Actuals through 04/30/2025	FY2025 Budget	Actuals % of Bud
<b>Income</b>			
Pledges and other donations	\$265,512	\$298,154	89.1%
Fundraisers and other income	\$16,532	\$16,650	99.3%
Income from cash reserves	\$22,321	\$26,785	83.3%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$304,365</b>	<b>\$341,589</b>	<b>89.1%</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
Personnel compensation	\$178,010	\$236,170	75.4%
Mission, Religious Development & Community	\$26,124	\$37,649	69.4%
Admin, Board & Finance	\$34,202	\$26,869	127.3%
Property	\$34,528	\$40,900	84.4%
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$272,864</b>	<b>\$341,588</b>	<b>79.9%</b>
<b>Net Income (from Operations)</b>	<b>\$31,501</b>	<b>\$1</b>	<b>Near zero %</b>

<b>Capital Campaign Status</b>	<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Balance</b>
<b>As of April 30, 2025</b>	<b>\$871,981</b>	<b>\$583,363</b>	<b>\$288,619</b>

## 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 06-30-24 and the amounts available for the Board to spend during fiscal year 2024-2025 (including unspent amounts carried over from prior years) were as follows:

- Legacy:	Value \$293,480. Available \$54,740.
- Miller-Lorentz Property:	Value \$253,279. Available \$53,939.
- Music:	Value \$122,257. Available \$27,064.

The Fund Trustees met by email on September 18, 2024, and voted 3-0 to approve a request from the Board to spend up to \$500 from the Music Endowment Fund to pay for renting space at The Gathering at Northern Hills for a choir retreat/rehearsal to prepare for the winter choral concert. Rob Thacker was the project leader for the request.

The Fund Trustees met by email on February 3, 2025, following the Board of Trustees approval of 3 requests for expenditures from the Music Endowment Fund. The Fund Trustees voted 3-0 to approve all three projects.

- Rob Thacker, Music Director, project leader. Up to \$1000 to purchase choir music folders.
- Rob Thacker, Music Director, project leader. \$500 to pianist Stephen Variames for composing a piece commissioned by the choir for the 2024 winter choral concert.
- Rob Thacker and Claire Wagner, project leaders. Up to \$3800 for a performance of Stephen Variames opera "Forward Into Light" about women's suffragist Alice Paul, March 8, 2025 at St. John's, followed by a reception and feedback hosted by the League of Women Voters.

The Fund Trustees will meet in June of 2025 to review the 2024-2025 year.  
The Fund Trustees will work on Legacy Giving in 2025-2026.

## Annual Pledge Campaign

Charles Spencer, Winnie Goodridge, Joetta Prost



Pledge campaign reports often begin with the following questions:

- How many people (or households) made a pledge for the next church year?
- How much did these members and friends pledge to contribute? and
- How do these results compare to past years?

To continue our effort to complete pledging earlier, this year we moved the goal for submitting pledges to April 6 (which was six weeks after the kick-off and three weeks shorter than in 2024). Many members

and friends responded during this focused timeframe, resulting in less need for follow-up. The team was able to report to the Board three days later that we already had received \$248,142 in pledges from 94 households.

As of May 15, 2025, a total of \$281,366 has been pledged by 119 households. This compares to \$278,000 pledged by 122 households last year. We are grateful for all pledges and we know that generosity comes in all sizes; this year's pledges ranged from \$5 to \$14,000. Nearly half of the households were able to increase their pledge for the coming year.

	Number of Households	Percent of Households
Increased pledge amount	54	46%
Same amount as last year	48	40%
Decreased pledge amount	17	14%
Total household pledges	119	100%

The Pledge Team worked with Rev. Jenn in creating our campaign theme: Together, Weaving our Future. The team was able to adapt another UU congregation's logo for our campaign. Rev. Jenn planned the kick-off Sunday service February 23 and introduced a loom as a tangible representation of our campaign theme; throughout the six weeks, members and friends of all ages contributed to the weaving.



Following Charles Spencer's kick-off message, Pledge Moments were offered by Brennan Grayson, Dick Fencil, Debbie Combs, Diana Long, Erna Olafson on the five remaining Sundays of the campaign. Rev. Jenn's continued support helped set a solid foundation for the 2025-2026 campaign.

While St. John's membership number has decreased post-pandemic, this year's pledges reflect a continued pattern of generous average giving. A table showing St. John's giving from 2016-2025 is provided below.

FISCAL YEAR	PLEDGE TOTAL	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
25-26	\$281,366	119	\$2,364

## Fund-Raising Team/Auction

Erin Zoller, Chair

Another great Auction FUNdraiser is in the books, yielding \$8532 for St. John's as of May 20. **Thanks to all of you** who donated a variety of services, gift cards, gathering opportunities, baked goods, and other lovely handmade items. **Thanks to all who attended and purchased, and thanks to all the volunteers** who helped make things run smoothly.

To see the auction items and results, click the Auction Site and book mark for next year!

[togetherauction.com/stjohnsuu](https://togetherauction.com/stjohnsuu)

## Santa's Kitchen

Nancy Henry, Coordinator

Santa's Kitchen is becoming an annual tradition at St. John's during the month of December. The concept is for people who enjoy baking or contributing baked goods to offer food for sale, and the price for anything to buy is "**whatever you can or want to pay.**" Sales occur before and after services on Sundays. Santa's Kitchen is a successful project because of the generosity of our members and friends who donate and then pay well for their purchases.

In December 2024 we expanded sales from two Sundays to three Sundays, and we made over \$1700. The effort is small - advertising, volunteers to donate the goodies, volunteers to set up and take money - that's about it. There is no cost to the church; and every dollar we take in goes to the operating budget. Very importantly, everyone has FUN!

## Yard Sale

Planning Team: Linda Heath, Debbie Combs, Nancy Henry, Ann Schuur, Jenn Summers

After a break of some years, St. John's held a Yard Sale August 3 to coincide with the community-wide U.S. 127 World's Longest Yard Sale. Thanks to your generous donations, there were bargains on the front lawn, in Haehnle and in Krolfifer. At the end of the day, unsold items were donated to non-profits St. Vincent DePaul, Angel's Arms, Brighton Center, Willows Project, Legacies and the Cincinnati Public Library. And we made **over \$3600** for the operating budget.

Thank you to everyone who helped with publicity, pricing, setup and a thousand different tasks the day of the sale. Special thanks to the 20+ folks who loaded the truck after the sale. We're grateful to each of you who donated and made purchases. Together you gave us the support and constructive feedback to try it again.

**Saturday, August 9, 2025** is the next **St. John's Rummage Sale**. Please start saving your donations and know we need your help and ideas again!

## 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 three forms used and obtained Nancy Greenlee's approval of them. Nancy Greenlee 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, with Joetta Prost, Bo Wachendorf, Kathy Shell, 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. That culminated in a very successful capital campaign, with pledges totaling over one million dollars and, last year, the restoration of the Sanctuary façade.



## THIS YEAR'S WORK

This year's work focused on the question of how we can build our future as a congregation. We have moved past the necessary maintenance on the Sanctuary facade, and to the opportunity to improve our Church home. As a congregation, the combination of our pledges and the financial resources of the church all shape one side of the proverbial coin. Additionally, our needs and wants as a congregation – to improve accessibility, to support Religious Education, and to create a welcoming community, while also addressing deferred maintenance – have shaped the other side of the coin.

The Master Planning team met with the board in July to educate the incoming board on the work done to date, and with buy-in from the board, started development of a five-year plan, including methods for assessment of financial projections and prioritization of deferred maintenance. As the church year unfolded, it became clear the complexities of such discussions within the church required additional insights, and clear and direct communication across vested parties. The board organized a series of “Both/And” conversations to look at our deferred maintenance needs, our facility improvement desires, and how to have the financial resources to accomplish both of these important things. Those participating are the members of the Board, Minister, Treasurer, Endowment Fund Trustees, and members of the following teams - Master Planning, Property, Capital Campaign, and Annual Pledge Campaign.

This Both/And team started meeting in October 2024, with work encompassing a review of St. John's history regarding funds for our building and updates about the financial resources we currently have available. A single document outlining all deferred maintenance needs has been created and agreed upon as a tool to guide how we address maintenance needs. Discussion included Master Planning Phase 2 preparation to address what the congregation wants to achieve with the remainder of our capital campaign funds, as well as methods for raising additional funds.



*The Both/And Team deep in planning*

This work then culminated in two ‘big discussions’ with the church, on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup> 2025. The first of these discussions focused on outlining for the congregation the constraints, challenges and opportunities that the Both/And team worked through; the team provided the education and context necessary to understand these complexities, and provided the opportunity for congregants to discuss their observations. The second big discussion focused on tying those elements together to form the Strategic Plan developed by the Both/And team, with recognition of the ambiguities that may still be

present within the plan. This phase of bringing the conversation to the congregation, and engaging small groups in it, has been a pivotal part of encouraging learning, as well as honest and candid conversation about next steps for the congregation.

This work has then led to the end of the church year, where the Board and other leaders who have served on the Both/And team hope for a congregational endorsement of the Both/And Strategic Plan, paving the way for teams to begin moving forward with projects from the plan.

### **NEXT STEPS FOR 2025-2026**

As we move into the 2025-2026 church year, we are excited by the possibility of what we can accomplish as a congregation. We have already accomplished so much with the restoration of the Sanctuary façade, and now have the opportunity to do more than that. While there certainly will be challenges in the path ahead regardless of the congregational vote in June, we are optimistic that the work the Both/And team has accomplished over the past year has benefited the congregation immensely, and will continue to help pave the way for earnest conversations, good design-making, and progress going forward.

The work of the Master Planning and Capital Campaign Teams is documented on the St. John's website here: <https://stjohnsuu.org/community/master-plan-capital-campaign/>

## **Building and Grounds Team**

Cliff Shisler, Building and Grounds Team Leader

**Team Responsibilities:** The Building and Grounds Team is responsible for the maintenance, repair, and upkeep of the church building and its surrounding grounds. This includes daily maintenance, project-based repairs, and groundskeeping.

### **Personnel:**

Jeff (Staff Caretaker): Responsible for daily building and grounds maintenance

Cliff Shisler: Team Leader, oversees all projects and team activities.

David Terry (Volunteer): Leads gardening and landscaping efforts.

Additional volunteers assist on a project basis.

### **MAINTENANCE, REPAIRS & REPLACEMENTS COMPLETED in 2024-25:**

Installed gas detector in the kitchen.

Replaced the refrigerator.

Assisted with setup and cleanup for the rummage sale.

Removed a hornet's nest.

Repaired the air conditioning unit.

Replaced the handicapped door opener button.

Installed a BLM banner.

Repaired a toilet seat, and repaired a leaking toilet..

Tightened the ladder to the upper roof.

Eliminated an odor in the Rosa Parks room.

Installed a handrail in the sanctuary.

Fixed a pizza oven gas leak.

Repaired the pocket door in the robing room.

Repaired the Krolfifer outside stairway.

Installed air conditioning units for downstairs rooms in the Found House.

Repaired a leak from the second roof.  
Contracted snow removal and cleared snow between the two parking lots with volunteers.  
Removed water from the Robing Room, Rosa Parks room, and Wells room.  
Replaced tiles where necessary.  
Fixed an exterior water leak into the boiler room.  
Scheduled to clean the carpet in Haehnle and Chapel this Spring.  
Ongoing boiler repairs and maintenance.

**LANDSCAPING:**

David Terry has led continuous weeding efforts and planted flowers throughout the church grounds, including flower planters at the entrance.  
David also maintains a flower garden and vegetable garden at the edge of the playground, with produce shared with the congregation.  
Organized a Fall and Spring cleanup, directing volunteers in weeding, mulching, and trimming.  
Continued efforts to control lesser celandine in and around the playground.  
Ongoing grounds upkeep including playground maintenance.

**NEAR-FUTURE PROJECTS:**

Continue efforts to eliminate lesser celandine.  
Paint interior spaces as needed.  
Install handrails where appropriate to improve safety.  
Improve drainage on the flat roof over the Krolfifer room.  
Replace rusted lintels over doors and windows.  
Begin installation of an instant hot water system in bathrooms and the kitchen.  
Repair and paint the entry stairways to the office and classrooms.

**FUTURE PROJECTS (LONG-TERM):**

Replace carpeting on the bema (\$1,000 - \$2,000).  
Replace windows throughout the original part of the church to reduce energy costs and improve aesthetics (\$80,000 - \$100,000).  
Replace air conditioning units with heat pumps in the sanctuary and Haehnle room to reduce energy costs (\$90,000 - \$100,000).  
Replace the kitchen stove (\$7,000 - \$15,000).  
Replace the kitchen stove exhaust system (\$1,000 - \$3,000).  
Replace the passthrough window in the kitchen.  
Repair the low wall on the entrance driveway (\$8,000 - \$10,000).  
Repair/replace/seal and re-stripe the parking lot (\$6,000 - \$7,000).  
Rebuild the parking lot (\$25,000 - \$30,000).  
Provide airflow and air conditioning to the classrooms (\$8,000 - \$12,000).  
Replace ceiling tiles in the upstairs rooms.  
Replace rusting electrical conduit on the roof.  
Repair the organ (\$50,000).  
Repair and re-seed the front lawn (\$5,000 - \$7,000).  
Install an elevator between all floors (\$250,000 - \$350,000).  
Install instant hot water systems at each sink and remove the hot water heater to reduce energy costs (\$5,000 - \$6,000).

After many years of service, our long-time Building and Grounds/Property Team Leader Cliff Shisler is retiring from his position. On behalf of the entire congregation, the Board thanks Cliff for his dedication, attention to detail and hard work taking care of this beautiful property. He hands off the role to Kathy Shell, starting in July. Thank you Cliff!

## Safe Congregation Committee

Kathy Shell and Erna Olafson, Co-Chairs; Rich Overturf, Stan Loeb (members)  
Wanda Crawford (board liaison), Rev. Jenn (advisor)

The Safe Congregation Committee had a change of leadership during the past year. Nan Fox served as co-chair from July 2024 until March 2025 when she stepped aside due to other commitments. Erna Olafson rejoined as co-chair with Kathy Shell. The Committee meets as needed throughout the year.

This year, St. John's has once again had to take legal action to restrict George Andrew Devlin from contacting the congregation in person, by mail or phone. Mr. Devlin has a long history of mental illness that leads him to be preoccupied with Unitarian Universalist congregations; this includes beliefs that he can 'save' UUs and that local UU congregations should allow him to preach. In 2019 he sent a long manifesto stating his views, which led the area congregations to obtain a five-year Protective Order. When that order expired in November, Mr. Devlin again began making unwanted contacts, leading to a repeat of the legal processes to restrict him from contacting any of the local UU congregations; this order is in effect through November 2029. Kathy Shell and Joetta Prost (board president) worked with our attorney and leaders from three Cincinnati congregations on this matter.

With the change of presidential administrations and the resultant aggressive approach to immigration, there was a need for St. John's leaders to be educated about risks for our congregation given our work related to the Sanctuary and Immigration Team. Please see the SIT report for details about the training that was offered for members.

St. John's has installed signs that state "No Firearms" at the front door of the church. In addition, per the guidance received in the immigration response training, a "Private" sign is being installed in areas where records are kept (Office, Wells, Minister's Robing Room).

The Safe Congregation Committee is in the process of completing its first annual review of policies related to safety. Several changes of policy will be made to clarify and bring up to date our expectations for members, ministers and staff of St. John's.

## Leadership Committee

Emily Hodges, Chair; Rich Overturf, David Strecker, Melissa Rowland (board liaison), Rev. Jenn (advisor)

The Leadership Committee had to find candidates who met membership criteria according to our By-Laws or for whom the Board would agree to waive one of the conditions of membership.

Candidates needed to be chosen by May 10, 2025. We met several times during the year both in person and virtually and had many communications by phone and email and were able to meet this deadline.

- (1) We found candidates for all three open positions.
- (2) All three candidates agreed to serve:

Erica Strauss agreed to serve on the board as Vice President. Length of term: Three years.

Greg Terhune agreed to serve on the board as Program Director. Length of term: Three years.

Pete Asman agreed to serve as one of the Fund Trustees (not a board position). Length of term: Two years.

- (3) All three candidates were approved by the Leadership Committee
- (4) All three candidates were approved by the Board.
- (5) We posted the nominees on the Bulletin Board in Krofifer prior to May 5.
- (6) An email was sent to the members of the congregation with each position and name of candidate and length of term in years.
- (7) We prepared ballots and absentee ballots for the election at the Congregational Meeting, and will announce the results of the election at the Congregational Meeting.

## Committee on Ministry/Transition Team

Gay Glasscott, Chair

This year the Transition Team was chaired by Gay Glasscott. Other members included Bill Luerssen, Dot Wehrmeyer, Mary Darner, Greg Terhune, and Mary Newman. Greg and Gay will be leaving the team this year. During the interim/transition period with Rev. Jenn, the Transition Team takes the place of the Committee on Ministry and has a different role. The Transition Team assists the minister and the congregation in accomplishing the tasks of ministry. The Team also gives the minister insight into the congregation and the needs of the congregants that she might not otherwise be aware of.

The Transition Team serves as the eyes and ears of the congregation as we assist our minister in every possible way as she devotes her time and energy guiding, healing, and providing us with a positive role model of what a caring, empathic minister looks like.

As we paid attention to the health and ministries of the congregation, we also developed a team covenant. We also plan to do a deep dive into the role of the minister with regard to "rites of passage."

## Communications and AV and Technology Teams

Claire Wagner, Communications Team Leader

### Delivering Services Electronically

We continued live streaming services on YouTube from the sanctuary and having an online "usher/greeter" helping from home or in sanctuary. Roberto Henriquez, our part-time AV-IT professional, manages the equipment, and is contracted to stream three services per month, so Monica Pellman and I take turns on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday (sometimes a 5<sup>th</sup>) with support from Pete Asman on occasion. Whoever is streaming also makes the announcement slides for that week.

We store most of our service recordings and other programs on our YouTube page so that those interested, and those curious, can see and hear them. We continue to renew and use two church Zoom accounts.

A team of volunteers including Joetta Prost, Monica, Pete, Amanda Toth, Debbie Combs and I volunteer as online ushers for services. Monica manages the online usher volunteer schedule. Lyn O'Brien, Dirk Iwema and Bridget help on occasion with sound for services.

## **Communications**

We continue using a free MailChimp account for E-news and other important emailed church communications. I now edit the E-news on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month and Edie Holder does the 4th Tuesday. Pamela Wilz and I are working on archiving names of people who haven't opened news from us in 6 months from the MailChimp subscriber list.

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 Facebook page. Monica Pellman as board secretary helps post items to the website. The board agreed with my decision to delete our church Twitter account in December.

We collaborated with the League of Women Voters of the Cincinnati Area via news releases to invite people to the "Forward Into Light" operatic performance composed by our pianist, Stephen Variames, with great success. We also streamed the evening.

We bought a year's worth of small ads in the Clifton Chronicle, in part with a gift from one of our members. 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. Thanks to Erica Strauss who has helped take photos, and to folks who take photos of their events. It's a team effort.

Thanks to Rev. Jenn for offering to help with administration of our public and private Facebook accounts.

## **Church Website**

Our website, [stjohnsuu.org](http://stjohnsuu.org), 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 and technology in general**

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

With good advice from member Josef Finsel, we purchased the use of a church password manager for our various technology and communications accounts. Josef spent many hours in winter helping our office administrator with computer organizations and online filing.

I am grateful that recently, Josef has agreed to take on tech duties beyond mine and Roberto's capacity, including supervising computer purchases, WordPress updates and our password manager.

I have a small role in updating our Vanco site with plan descriptions and images each year.

## Covenant Development Team

Melissa Rowland, Chair

The covenant development committee has been very busy this year. We had a Sunday service focused on covenant where everyone was encouraged to submit ideas to include in the congregational covenant. We host a table in coffee hour most Sundays to discuss covenant with those wanting to learn more or interested in sharing their feedback on sample covenants we have provided.

We look forward to offering a draft covenant in the new church year for the congregation to review. Once the draft is finalized we will hold a congregational meeting to vote on using it.

## Mission

### The Wider UU World Team (Denominational Affairs)

Joetta Prost, Team Leader, with members John Kachuba, Carol Fencel, Melissa Rowland, Pete Asman

**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](http://www.uua.org).

#### Revision of the UUA Principles and Purposes in Article II

When last year's report was prepared, St. John's delegates were about to participate in the 2924 UUA General Assembly (GA) <https://www.uua.org/ga> where delegates voted on major revisions to the UUA Bylaws Article II. This vote culminated years of study and discussion about the proposed changes; in spring 2024, as we neared the GA vote, we created [this summary](#) about the Article II development, amendment, and voting processes. St. John's Board appointed four delegates for the 2024 General Assembly: Melissa Rowland, Nicole Stanforth, Howard Tolley, and Joetta Prost, with Alicia Rosselot as an alternate delegate. Our delegates voted their conscience on all issues.

By a vote of over 80% in favor, delegates to the June 2024 GA approved the changes to the UUA Bylaws Article II. Read about this decision here:

<https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/new-language-core-values>

The changes included the adoption of six values - Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity - with Love in the center. This 'flower' image was incorporated to reflect these values and each value includes covenantal language designed to put the value into action. This replaced the seven principles language that had been included in the bylaws since the 1980's.





### **Interdependence**

- We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it.
- We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

### **Pluralism**

- We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology.
- We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.

### **Justice**

- We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive.
- We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large.

### **Transformation**

- We adapt to the changing world.
- We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

### **Generosity**

- We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.
- We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

### **Equity**

- We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness.

- We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.

*Additional adopted changes reflected updates to our Inspirations, Inclusion language, and statement regarding Freedom of Belief:*

### **Section C-2.3. Inspirations**

Direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder are primary sources of Unitarian Universalist inspiration. These experiences open our hearts, renew our spirits, and transform our lives. We draw upon, and are inspired by, sacred, secular, and scientific understandings that help us make meaning and live into our values. These sources ground us and sustain us in ordinary, difficult, and joyous times. We respect the histories, contexts, and cultures in which these sources were created and are currently practiced. Grateful for the experiences that move us, aware of the religious ancestries we inherit, and enlivened by the diversity which enriches our faith, we are called to ever deepen and expand our wisdom.

### **Section C-2.4. Inclusion**

Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to replace such barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect. We strive to be an Association of congregations that truly welcome all persons who share our values. We commit to being an Association of congregations that empowers and enhances everyone's participation, especially those with historically marginalized identities.

### **Section C-2.5. Freedom of belief**

Congregational freedom and the individual's right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist heritage.

Congregations may establish statements of purpose, covenants, and bonds of union so long as they do not require that members adhere to a particular creed.

The 2025 General Assembly will take place in mid-June in Baltimore and online. Wanda Crawford and Joetta Prost will serve as St. John's delegates this year. Decisions to be made at this year's GA include the election of a new Moderator of the UUA (the "board president" role).

### **What are some ways that the UUA has supported St. John's during the past two years?**

During times of ministerial transition, UUA Regional Staff provide invaluable support for congregational leaders and ministers. 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. She also serves in a leadership role within the group of Interim Ministers. She will be with us until August 2026.

Beginning in October 2024, the St. John's board has engaged in learning about different types of UU ministers - Settled, Contract, Interim and Developmental ministry. The board's goal has been to determine which type of ministry would best serve our congregation beyond Rev. Jenn's time with us, to help us continue moving forward. The board's Plan for Minister Selection recommends Developmental Ministry and will be brought to the congregation at the June 1 annual meeting. A search team will be

formed at St. John's to facilitate matching with a new minister in 2026, again using the UUA's Transition Office process.

The UUA provides many services and supports to congregations. Our benefit plans for health insurance, retirement, and disability are managed by the UUA and the staff of the UUA's Compensation and Benefits Office are often consulted by congregational leaders.

Side with Love <https://sidewithlove.org/> is the organizing strategy team of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Side with Love provides a variety of programs and resources to support social justice work across the country.

New anti-racism resources, under the title The Mosaic have been developed by the UUA to support individual and congregational learning.

The UUA represents us on the national level. On February 11, the UUA announced that it had joined a multifaith coalition and the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection in filing a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's ICE "sensitive locations policy." Churches (along with schools and hospitals) had previously been protected from ICE enforcement actions, but a Department of Homeland Security memo rescinded that protection on January 20th. The UUA often partners with larger faith groups to maximize our impact on social justice issues.

### **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.") <https://www.uua.org/finance/apf/why-we-give>

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 20 years. This commitment and connection with the Wider UU World is something for which we can be proud.

### **UUA MIDAMERICA REGION**

The [MidAmerica Region of the UUA](#) provides valuable updates and [resources](#) via their monthly newsletter. Especially helpful are the programs for congregational leaders.

St. John's member Melissa Rowland has been elected to a one year position on The [Midwest Unitarian Universalist Conference \(MUUC\)](#). MUUC furthers the interests of UU's and their institutions in the Midwest through disbursement of the surplus income generated by funds in trust. Its work fosters the interests of the UUA and supports spreading the message of Unitarian Universalism.

### **CINCINNATI UU WORLD**

Rev. Jenn has pointed out how fortunate we are to have a number of UU congregations in Cincinnati who collaborate and connect. 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 this past year:

- In May, the Council sponsored the annual joint service for all UU Congregations. Taking place at First Unitarian Church, this year, the ministers serving St. John's, First Unitarian Church and Heritage UU Church provided an "Answer Box" service. Questions addressed focused on wide-ranging topics and the ministers provided diverse responses.

- A major initiative of UUCGC this year has been a continuation of anti-racism programming that was begun in 2021. In 2025, facilitators condensed the previous 8 introspective sessions to 6 reflective sessions and added new material on the complex topics of (a) systemic racism in policing and incarceration and (b) reparations. All past participants were invited to attend the new sessions, and 10 did so.
  - This programming, conducted on Zoom from February to April, 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 Linnea Lose from First Unitarian Church to serve as co-facilitators of the antiracism 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 43 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.
  - The Anti-Racism efforts of the Council resulted in the awarding of a small grant from the UUA's MidAmerica Region to support our efforts.
- St. John's dues to the UUCGC (\$5 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.
- In June 2025, UUCGC will once again have a presence at the Cincinnati Pride parade and festival, as well as at the [Festival of Faiths](#).
- St. John's three representatives to UUCGC this year were Carol Fencil, Pete Asman and Joetta Prost. St. John's is well-represented in UUCGC leadership; Pete is serving as the Treasurer for the UUCGC, and in her role as Vice-President, Carol has focused on bringing engaging programs for the UUCGC meetings in September, November, February and May.

## STATE UU NETWORKS

Ohio's statewide UU organization is known as [UUJO](#) (**Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio**). UUJO continues to be in a "housekeeping" mode, as it works to make sure its finances are in order and the website is updated. Unfortunately, while in a "housekeeping" mode, UUJO is unable to actively engage in specific social justice issues at this time. Rev. Thomas Cruse is a new Board member and is working on the website. The Board is actively seeking additional Board members.

Launched in 2020 during the pandemic, [KUUIAN](#) (**Kentucky UU Justice Action Network**) represents the 900 UUs who live in the Bluegrass State, including approximately 20 St. John's members who live in Northern KY. During the January – April legislative session, KUUIAN continued to work with other KY non-profit organizations to lobby for key issues. KUUIAN folks worked with the UUA's UU The Vote (UUTV) program; KUUIAN received a small UUTV grant to support the work of voter engagement for the November 2024 election. An energetic postcard campaign regarding KY Amendment Issue # 2 helped defeat this anti-public school amendment. St. John's members wrote and sent over 2,600 postcards! The first-ever in-person retreat for KUUIAN took place on June 9, 2024 in Louisville, providing KY UUs an opportunity to meet those with whom they had only previously engaged on Zoom.

## Outreach Committee

Ashley Cowperthwait, Chair

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

### FY 2024-25 OUTREACH GRANT RECIPIENTS

Jan 2025	Communities United for Action	\$1500
Feb 2025	Let's Write a Personnel Statement-NKU	\$1000
Grant Total		<b>\$2,500</b>

2. The Committee also selects 10 monthly **Split-the-Plate** recipients from non-profits suggested by the congregation. Beginning Fall 2024 Split-the-Plate collections were held on the first Sunday of the month. The SPLIT THE PLATE recipients and proceeds are listed here

MONTH	ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT
Jul 2024	No Split the Plate	
Aug 2024	No Split the Plate	
Sep 2024	Ohio Allycat Rescue OAR	420.75
Oct 2024	Angels Arms	292.85
Nov 2024	Life Learning Center	482.50
Dec 2024	Last Minute Food Mile	645.00
Jan 2025	NAMI Joey	286.50
Feb 2025	Cradle Cincinnati	566.75
Mar 2025	Sleep in Heavenly Peace	423.50
Apr 2025	UU Service Committee	TBD
May 2025	Ohio Pet Sanctuary	TBD
Jun 2025	Center for Respite Care	TBD

**To Date 3117.85**

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

Anne Septic	2022-2025
Ashley Cowperthwait	2022-2025 (outgoing chair 2024-2025)
Marty Harrington	2023-2026
Linda Heath	2023-2026
Joey Oakwood	2024-2027
David Behrens	2024-2027

4. The December Split-the-Plate recipient Last Minute Food Mile gave a presentation at the Sunday Forums. By mutual agreement, we'll continue to share STP names and information for the Forum Team's consideration next year.
5. The February grant recipient sent a thank you and update about how the money would be used. Dr. Hindman included a note as well "Thanks to St. John's generosity, Kalkidan will be applying to 10 highly ranked medical schools in the next 2-3 months. As she writes in her essay, her experiences as a recent immigrant from Ethiopia have prepared her to work hard and pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor. She came highly recommended by the head of the pre-medical prep program at NKU as a student of high promise for whom the application fees would pose an insurmountable barrier. And I am also grateful that our church works toward diversity and equity in this meaningful and impactful way - thank you!"

## Social Justice Committee

John Kachuba and Wanda Crawford, Co-Coordiators

The roles of the Social Justice Co-Coordiators, 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.

### 2024-2025 Social Justice Annual Expenditures

\$2500 Budget			
Ignite Peace	Membership	\$400	August 5, 2024
	2024 Annual Gathering	\$250	August 5, 2024
RoSho Awards	New BLM banner	\$450	August, 2024
Ohio Justice & Policy Center		\$500	October 7, 2024
Unitarian Universalist for Social Justice		\$200	November 19, 2024
Ann Schuur (Gay Pride flag)		\$ 31.45	March 16, 2025
		-----	
		\$1,831.45	
Total		\$1,831.45	
Budget		\$2,500.00	
Variance		\$ 668.55	

Requests for funding from nonprofit organizations was significantly lower this year than in past years, leaving the budget with a surplus of \$668.55

## Sanctuary and Immigration Team

John Kachuba, Interim Team Leader/Coordinator

The SIT team saw a major transition in its work with immigrant communities with the arrival of the Trump administration in 2025. What had been a cooperative, humanitarian effort to aid immigrants became one centered more on immigrant rights and protection. The Team found itself working in “two worlds.”

Here are some highlights of the Team’s work over the past year:

1. Clifton United Methodist Church Sanctuary – In 2024, the Yokobatake family arrived in the sanctuary from Brazil. They are seeking asylum in the US. Amy Monson has been the Team’s lead person with the Sanctuary Coalition and has spent many hours seeing to the family’s support and maintain St. John’s affiliation with the Sanctuary Coalition.
2. Willows Project – For at least the last three years, volunteers from the SIT, led by Claire Wagner have been involved in food distribution to immigrants at the Willows apartments and others in the Springdale area. New St. John’s volunteers who are not “officially” on the SIT have been recruited and trained to help with this ongoing effort. Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center presented an award to volunteers involved in the Willows Project.
3. Thanksgiving Fellowship Dinner – Several members of the Team, collaborated with Linda Ford and a team from Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church to host a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner for 85 immigrants and allies at Friendship United Church in Wyoming. In addition to the food (and there was plenty for them to take home), gift bags of personal hygiene products were given to the guests. Children in St. John’s RE program colorfully decorated 100 paper bags for the products.
4. In light of immigrant persecution by the Trump administration, John Kachuba set up Zoom programs about immigration rights (and the rights of immigrant allies), produced by Catholic Charities of Southwest Ohio, Legal Aid Society, and Immigrant Law, for UUCGC and open to all UU congregations in Ohio. John also provided to the St. John’s Board a protocol for how to handle an ICE visit at the church, although SIT is uncertain whether the Board has acted on it.
5. SIT continues to work with its long time partners in the Sanctuary Coalition, Ignite Peace, and the Immigrant Dignity Coalition in all manners concerning our immigrant communities.

## Found House

Wanda Crawford, Team Leader

**Found House Team Members:** Laura Bange, Josef Finsel, Nancy Henry, Emily Hodges, Nancy Johnson, Amy Monson, Matthew Peterson, Charles Spencer, David Strecker.

2024-2025 was the second year of the Found House program. We hosted in July (7 nights) and November (10 nights). Then the board approved a third host week for this budget year, with the expectation that we will return to hosting twice a year in 2025-2026, likely fall and spring.

**Our Guests:** During our three host weeks, we served 12 families, which included 16 adults and 23 children. Children’s ages ranged from 16 years down to 4 months. Parents’ ages ranged from early 20s to late 40s.



More than half the parents worked, some with two jobs or double shifts. Their long work hours plus picking up children from daycare or a relative meant arriving at the congregation late in the evening. While each family's circumstances are unique, reasons disclosed for becoming unhoused included landlords raising rent to an unaffordable level (most common reason), an extended illness or hospitalization that caused job loss, and fleeing an abusive relationship. Volunteers observed incredible parenting skills in these difficult circumstances: parents doing everything they can to keep their children safe, secure, happy and beloved.

Some families choose to spend time together in their rooms with little interaction with volunteers. Some enjoy seeing their kids play with other kids and adults. Some put their children to bed right after supper. Some stay up late but respect others' need for quiet. Sometimes a parent will disclose something heavy on their heart. When that happens, we try to hold space for their grief and worry, knowing that we can't fix it but can show we care and believe in them.

**Our Volunteers:** Each host week, 55-65 individuals participated in a variety of ways, from donating food, supplies or craft kits, to engineering air conditioning for sleeping rooms, setting up and tearing down, providing meals, washing dishes and laundry, playing with children, and staying overnight. Each host week, there were several children from St John's and other congregations who accompanied their parents to play with our guest children.

**Support From and To Partner Congregations:** Heritage UUs were heavily involved each week, organized by Rae Jane Araujo and Meredith Meyer. First Unitarians filled several roles, with Faith Maynard and Dan Schneider as organizers. Long-time partner Cincinnati Southern Baptist and newer partner Our Lady of the Rosary provided wonderful meals and loving support for our guests on their assigned evenings. More new partners, Dave & Cyndy Butz of College Hill Presbyterian, stayed overnight each week; they often knew the families from hosting them at their own congregation. Rae Jane and Faith also recruited non-church groups to participate, so our network continues to expand!

In addition to being a host congregation, St. John's continued our role as a support congregation for First UCC in College Hill, providing meals, playmates, and overnight hosts five times from December to March. Interacting with Pastor Dan at First UCC, Dave & Cyndy from CHP, and Maggie from OLR—all long-time host congregation coordinators—has helped our FH team and volunteers see alternate ways of doing things as we continue to learn and adapt each time we host.

**Challenges and Team Response:** 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 get less sleep. Lack of a shower in our building was inconvenient for families. While they have access to showers at the FH/IHN day center, it is not open 24 hours so hygiene was another "destination" to fit into busy schedules.

The Found House team meets before and after each host week to plan and to debrief. We discuss what worked, new adaptations to try, and how we can better serve our families. Since hosting is spiritual as well as practical work, we hope to have another congregation-wide reflection session on our hospitality practice, as we did in 2024.

Our budget was \$1600 for 2024-2025.

- Expenses for each host week were:
  - July \$800
  - November \$525
  - May (estimate) \$425

- o Program expenses (congregational lunch, background checks) \$270
- o Total (estimate) \$2020
- Unexpected income: First Church made a donation of \$130 designated for Found House in gratitude for using St. John's space for their congregational retreat.
- We have requested \$1600 for 2025-2026.

Our next host week for 2025 is November 16-26 (10 nights). Our second host week in the 2025-2026 budget year has not been scheduled yet.

## Partner Church Team

Edie Holder, Team Leader

News from Szendlazlo, Romania:

Rev. Bela-Botond Jakabhazi reports that last year they repaired the west side of the roof of the old school house, now currently the loom house. They also repaired the roof on the parish house and installed new tiles. New gutters and a covered terrace are planned. The materials for these have already been purchased, and a contractor has been hired. This next year they wish to continue the work on the eastern side of the loom house roof and start work on the parish house's foundation.

Our soup and bread lunches have raised \$1928. Thanks to everyone who participated in helping with our lunches. Y'all know who you are, and there are too many for me to attempt listing by name. We couldn't do it without the efforts of many folks in our congregation. So thanks for eating, cooking, dish washing, table set up, and all other tasks needed to make these lunches happen.

This year we tweaked our money gathering. Previously we charged \$6 per adult and \$3 for children, always accepting extra donations from those who wish to give more. As we want to be more inclusive and deny anyone with financial concerns from joining in on our community gathering, we have changed to a "pay what you will" plan. These lunches are about our community gathering as well as a fundraiser for Szendlazlo.

On a historical note... St. John's made the decision to participate in the Partner Church Program almost 35 years ago, after the fall of Communism and the deposing and execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu. While the economic situation in Romania has changed greatly, for the better, our support for them is still vital to them. Without our support, finding the funds for needed deferred maintenance of their buildings would be much more difficult. Again thanks to everyone. This connection helps us be part of a larger world community as well as enriching our own community.

## Green Sanctuary Partners

Jeanne Nightingale, Team Leader

During Fall and Spring meetings, consideration was given to being realistic, i.e., what is the 'do-ability' of Green Sanctuary projects, including team members' personal energy and resources. A list of do-able tasks now includes:

1. **Outdoor Sanctuary.** Thank you to all who lent a hand for the Fall and Spring Clean-up. What a difference! People noticed! But it was a lot of work! We need to do this more often! So we decided to meet for an hour the **3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of every month** during the seasons.
2. **Compost Program.** Re-activating composting at St John's is a do-able task. Deb Potochnik volunteered to look for a 5 gal compost bin. We will take turns monitoring the bin during soup lunches /potlucks. Consider compost lessons as RE. Ideal green to brown ratio is: **3 parts**

**Brown to 1 part Green = Carbon to Nitrogen = Energy to Nutrients.** Approximate balance for the microorganisms involved in the decomposition process.

3. **Trees and Native Plantings.** Expansion of our butterfly garden. David Terry planted a native Catulpa tree in the front garden (aka Catawba) which provides shade. (Downside: Beautiful leaves & flowers, but a bit messy, smelly, and invasive.) Another idea: cherry trees ala UU 'discussion circle.' (Downside: hard to mow grass.)
4. **Renew Changing CO<sub>2</sub>urse?** Popular community education/ discussion program. Join Sierra Club monthly education series first Monday evenings.

#### St. John's UU Green Sanctuary History

St John's was accredited as a Green Sanctuary Church. It took over 10 years to earn our plaque. The demands of the program, while impactful, also unintentionally led to burnout on UU teams. The more we understand that climate disruption emerges from systematic oppression, we expand our ability to understand what we need to do.

The new UUA name: Green Sanctuary 2030. ( UUA no longer use the term 'accreditation.' ) Sustainability efforts focus on community resilience, justice, waste reduction, congregational transformation, building collaborative partnerships to further environmental justice.

#### St. John's congregational successes:

- Changing Course educational/ community discussion series
- Pizza garden creation/ Compost from the kitchen
- Supported the plastic bag ban in Cincinnati (that was then overturned by State of Ohio)
- Greened our Kitchen; Performed energy audit of physical plant; Audited Congregation's sustainability practices; Integrated 7<sup>th</sup> UU principle in services and religious education
- Worked on local environmental justice projects: Apple St. Market: Rain Garden with Clifton School

#### Goals/ideas discussion:

- Garden - cultivate biodiversity, native perennials and a cutting garden (which could be a revenue stream)
- Composting program - expand & educate. Put out kitchen bin during coffee hour, get a bigger bin, have someone gather compostable materials. (Note, outside compost bin is rusted & can't be turned).
- EarthSpirit at SJUU (pagan affinity group) - cross-promote programs & education presentations
- Identify existing opportunities & orgs to collaborate with (don't reinvent the wheel). Invite them to make presentations/ hold trainings at SJUU
- Someone should attend other org's meetings & report back to SJUU for collaboration
- Community resilience discussion on intersectionality of socioeconomic factors & disadvantages as it pertains to waste, recycling, food access, etc. plus related educational opportunities
- Communications: email list; Facebook - follow relevant UU groups & repost in SJUU facebook group; online signup for events/volunteer opportunities

#### Outreach ideas:

- CUFA – Communities United for Action - equitable water fees, sewer backup
- Sierra Club (Jeanne) – educational (not focused enough on environmental justice)

- SMART trash - today's Forum topic before service was presented by Bob Gedert, former president of the National Recycling Coalition
- Faith Communities Go Green (FCGG - part of Green Umbrella) participation.
- Hamilton County R3source
- Cincinnati Recycling & Reuse Hub
- Food Not Bombs
- Our Harvest Cooperative (local worker owned organic farm in College Hill)
- Volunteering at food pantry / soup kitchen (Le Soupe?)
- Queen City Commons - local co-op that collects & sells compost
- Camp Washington Orchard - composting
- Sustainable stores (Cuyahoga County program) Our Vice Mayor approves
- City of Cincinnati compost program as part of Smart Trash
- "Cans for cats" metal recycling & shredded paper collected in support of local pet shelter by Nicole, SJUU member

## Community

### Caring Team

Sharon Loeb, Team Leader, with members Kathy Laufman, Ann Schuur, Nina Tolley

Our four team members stay in touch by text, zoom, phone, email, and in person meetings when we can. A dedicated volunteer continues to send special cards to those members or friends we hear about who are experiencing illness or other hardships. The team recruits members to bring meals and provide rides to doctor appointments when a member is in need.

This church year, with the help of volunteers, we supported First Church in their memorial service for our Minister Emeritus, Rev. Frank Carpenter.

We assisted with the memorial services for long term members, Barbara Hadden and Mira Rodwan. We also volunteered to help with the memorial service of a Clifton neighbor who had years of connection with St. John's. In collaboration with the Men's Group, we are planning a Celebration of Life for Charles' Siebert on June 21st. The Team provided a compassionate bridge to several members who due to illness or hardship needed continued connection to our community. Volunteers brought meals, visited, and sent cards and emails.

We provide information and facilitate changes to the Memorial Garden.

### Membership Team

Ann Schuur, Board Liaison to the Membership Team

149 active members, including 3 emeritus members

42 friends

5 resigned

4 died

9 removed due to inactivity

Six people became new members this church year. We have lost members through resignations, deaths and inactivity. We reviewed the Friends listed in the People Book and the Enews subscribers and removed some who had not come for a very long time, and added some.

While there is currently no Membership Team in place, several people do the work of Membership. Notably, Deb Potochnik, who contacts new people, Stan Loeb takes pictures for the Membership Wall, and Nancy Henry and Debbie Combs update Name tags, the Membership Wall, and assist the Program Director in keeping things going. Program Director, Ann Schuur, has been acting team leader. This year several people agreed to be after service welcomers. Greeters 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. In July 2025 we will welcome Nancy Henry and Debbie Combs as Co-Leaders of the Membership Team! And we will say thank you to Ann Schuur for filling this important role for the past two years! The team will be looking for members to join the team!

## Spirit Connections Team

Gay Glasscott, Team Leader

Our Spirit Connections Team has organized and hosted two very successful events, thus far. February 7, 2025 was the Potluck and No Talent Talent Show and on April 11, 2025 the Potluck and Dance party. September 28, 2025 will be our final Potluck (no theme chosen yet).

Spirit Awards have been awarded to several individual St. Johners and a group award. More to come in 2025. Our goal and mission continues to be to provide fun and creative ways for folks to connect and pursue interests within our St. John's community.

## Greeters Team

Greg Terhune, Team Leader

The Greeters team is going strong with nine members. The team does a good job of watching for, and welcoming potential new members before service starts each Sunday, as well as distributing the printed order of service and hymnals, providing visitors' nametags, and answering questions, etc. The team secures the entry doors once the service starts, as part of our overall building safety policy.

## Art Team

Anne Endress Skove, Team Leader

**May 2024:** The [Photography Club of Greater Cincinnati](#) had a fantastic group show!

**July - August 2024:** Nature/wildlife photographer [Constance Lee Menefee](#) shared her brilliant work with us.

**September 2024:** Project manager **Kip Eagan** facilitated a poster project with the Clifton Community Recreation Center after school program to bring a message of nonviolence and kindness to our walls.

**October 2024:** [Karen Boyhen](#) drew people in the neighborhood on an enormous scroll that wound around the gallery. She had a well-attended reception that included artists and co-workers from Visionaries + Voices, as well as her musician partner, Ricky Nye.

**November - December 2024:** As she does every holiday season, [Kate Spencer](#) showed her Christmassy quilts.

**February 2025:** For “Fuzzy 2,” Kentucky artists Anne Leader and Carol Fried brought their work (some of which had been exhibited in the Cincinnati Book Arts Society’s “[Heavens, Earth, & Us](#)” show at Thomas More College) and hosted a beautiful reception.

**March - April 2025:** Manuel Susarret showcased his mother, Edith Susarret Marrero’s portraits. Miss Edith was like a grandma to many of our youth, a happy voice in the choir, a mentor to artists, and an energizing presence at St. John’s over the years, and she is [missed](#). It was wonderful for Manuel to share this work with us. If you look closely, you may see some familiar faces on her canvases. Moreover, the timeframe encompassed the annual St. John’s auction. Thus, Manuel was able donate some of the proceeds/artwork to the auction.

### What’s next?

- Saad Ghosn brings [SOS](#) Cincinnati’s art and poetry to us in May/June. SOS’s activist art squares with St. John’s spirit of nonviolence and global peace.
- Artist and writer Nancy Johanson, along with at least 3 generations of her family, hope to exhibit their artwork.
- The Photography Club of Greater Cincinnati returns, date TBA!
- Friends of St. John’s member David Walker, who passed away earlier in 2025, are planning a retrospective of his [splendid fiber art](#) works, as well as a small reception for those who wish to gather to remember him.
- Fantastic Ekphrastic! Originally scheduled for April, this will happen later in the year.
- Kate Spencer returns for the holidays!
- “Fuzzy 3!” Yes, I hope to do a “Fuzzy” show every February.





## Men's Group

Howard Tolley, Coordinator; Steering Committee members: David Strecker, John Kachuba, Jim McDonough, Rich Driefuss.

In its 38th year the St. John's Men's Group continued monthly dinner meetings the first Sunday of each month at the church, two summer get-togethers at members' homes and an annual retreat. The October 2024 retreat at Twin Towers in College Hill included a morning QiGong lesson led by David Mast, lunch, a program on aging presented by the AARP, a visit to the nearby Aiken H.S. farm and a mid afternoon woods walk to enjoy fall colors.

Dave Strecker and Rich Driefuss joined the steering committee. In early 2025 the group recorded predictions for political, economic, athletic, and other outcomes in the coming year to permit a scorecard tally in January 2026. In collaboration with the Caring Circle, the group plans a June ice cream social in memory of long time member Charles Seibert. Newcomers are encouraged to discover 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. Walk-ins are always welcome whether or not signed up for the mailing list.

## LGBTQ+ Community

Joetta Prost, Coordinator

During a time of such tremendous antagonism in our country regarding the rights of LGBTQ+ people, our congregation offers a safe space for all genders and proclaims that Love is Love.

In early 2024, the LGBTQ+ members and friends of St. John's began meeting occasionally at church or meeting up for activities in the community. This grew from an awareness that while LGBTQ+ folks are clearly welcomed by our congregation, lack of visibility can make it harder for new congregants to feel included and meet other LGBTQ+ St. John's members and friends.

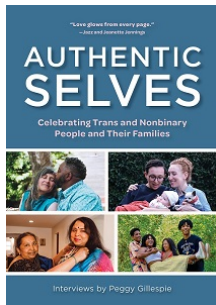
The congregation's blessing of the Progressive Pride Flag prior to it being installed in our building was a highlight for our community this year. See below for an explanation of the history of the Pride flag.



Other activities this year both supported the LGBTQ+ community and educated allies. In February, ten St. John's members participated in a webinar titled *Defend Trans Lives: A Webinar for People of Faith*. Sponsored by the UUA's MidAmerica Region and provided by [Transforming Hearts Collective](#), this trans-led webinar was designed to equip people of faith to understand what's going on, become more



familiar with the experiences and realities of trans people, and learn how to advocate for trans rights and ensure that our church is a welcoming and safe space for trans people in this moment. Workshop Presenter Alix Kapitan shared a helpful document **UU Actions & Resources to Support Trans Justice & Safety**: [tinyurl.com/UU-trans-action](https://tinyurl.com/UU-trans-action)



In March, St. John's hosted a discussion of the book *Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families*. This collection of narratives, with over 30 stories of a wide diversity of trans and nonbinary people and those they call family, was the [2024-2025 UUA Common Read](#). UUs from the Cincinnati area were included in the invitation to learn and grow by discussing these stories.

Area UUs will once again participate in the 2025 Cincinnati Pride Festival and Parade. This is an opportunity to spread the word about our life-affirming, life-saving faith.

Looking ahead during these challenging social times, St. John's has the opportunity to engage further in support of the LGBTQ+ community by completing a [renewal of our Welcoming Congregation program](#). Perhaps we can make this happen in 2025-2026?

All LGBTQ+ activities are publicized in the St. John's enews and via the [St. John's CommUUunity](#) Facebook page.

### A Brief History of the Ever-Evolving PRIDE FLAG

Gilbert Baker created the original **Pride Flag** in 1978. Baker was urged by Harvey Milk to create a symbol for the LGBT community and he chose a flag, which he saw as the most powerful symbol of pride. The pride flag was composed of eight (later reduced to six) colored stripes stacked on top of each other to evoke a rainbow, a symbol of hope.

Baker's flag was embraced internationally as the symbol of the LGBTQ community and inspired many designers and activists to create subsequent flags for more specific identities, such as the **Transgender Flag**, created by Monica Helms in 1999. The Transgender Pride flag consists of five horizontal stripes: Two blue stripes representing the traditional color for baby boys, two pink stripes representing the traditional color for baby girls, and a white stripe for people who are transitioning, nonbinary, and agender.

The design of the **Progress Pride Flag** that we have hung at St. John's was developed in 2018 by non-binary American artist and designer Daniel Quasar. Based on the iconic rainbow flag from 1978, the redesign celebrates the diversity of the LGBTQ community. With stripes of black and brown to represent marginalized LGBTIQ+ people of color and the triad of blue, pink, and white from the trans flag, the design represents diversity and inclusion. Quasar stated that the fight for inclusivity needs to come from both within and outside the LGBTQ community – from all spheres of society.

Subsequently released under a Creative Commons license (allowing others to copy, distribute and make use of their work non-commercially), the Progress Pride flag has become a blueprint design used by identities underrepresented within the LGBTQ community.

## 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 have held off on making any significant purchases waiting for the Both/And plan to be finalized for the kitchen. We still need 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 is a group of UUs who define our spirituality as Earth-centered: folks have a variety of beliefs, and everyone is welcome to join us. EarthSpirit membership is not required to attend our events or services.

EarthSpirit led a Samhain Service in October 2024 with an ancestor altar for photos of loved ones. Though the customary Winter Solstice service was not held in December, a Ritual of Release Service was held by Rev. Jenn. Our celebration of Beltane, the Gaelic May Day festival, was scheduled to follow the annual flower communion service. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't conducive for dancing the MayPole that day. It was danced a few weeks later, welcoming the coming of summer.

EarthSpirit will be holding some informal gatherings this summer as well as hosting a book club. Books suggested include [Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism](#) and [Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions](#). We will also plan out the services for 2025-2026. Reestablishing the group as an official CUUPS chapter is also in the works.

Look for announcements for upcoming events in the e-news, the SJUU Facebook group, and the order of service. If you are interested in joining or would like more information, send an email to [earthspiritcuups@gmail.com](mailto:earthspiritcuups@gmail.com) or look for Shannon or Douglas at church.

## Meditation Group

Alicia Rosselot, Group Leader

The Meditation Group meets weekly Wednesday evenings from 4:30-5:15 in Haenle lobby and Sunday mornings from 10:00-10:45 in the Gandhi room. Typically, 2-3 St. John's members attend regularly and we have occasional visitors. When St. John's hosts Found House families, we meet in Wells. In 2025, leadership transitioned from Alicia Rosselot and Erna Olafson to David Strecker.