

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Art by Carol Fields

First Congregational United Church of Christ of Sarasota

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First Congregational United Church of Christ – Sarasota

Annual Meeting: January 28, 2024 – 12:15 p.m. Sanctuary/YouTube/Facebook

Call to Order	Nancy Morris, Moderator
Opening Prayer	Harold Mezile, Vice Moderator
Confirmation of a Quorum	Janet Tipton, Parliamentarian
2023 Annual Report	
Review & Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes	Lynne Woodman, Secretary
Approval of Team Annual Reports & Membership Report	Nancy Morris
Nominations Committee Report	Nancy Morris
· Nomination & Election of Team Members · Nomination & Election of Officers	
Financial Reports	
· Endowment Fund	Cindy Woodling, Chair, Endowment
· 2023 Balance Sheet	Robin Reich & Dale Woodling, Treasurers
· 2024 Budget	Finance, Budget, & Stewardship Team
Recognition of Immediate Past Moderator, Jim Butterworth	Nancy Morris & Harold Mezile
Passing of Gavel	Nancy Morris & Harold Mezile
Motion to Adjourn	Harold Mezile
Closing Prayer	Pastor Wes

**Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting
First Congregational UCC of Sarasota
Annual Meeting
January 29, 2023**

Moderator Jim Butterworth called the meeting to order at 11:50 AM. Vice Moderator, Nancy Morris, offered the opening prayer.

Twenty paper ballots had been submitted from people who could not attend in person. Janet Tipton, parliamentary, confirmed quorum.

Approval of minutes of the 2022 annual meeting moved by Barbara Ralph and seconded by Gordon Quimby. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

Approval of Membership Report and Team Reports in the 2022 Annual Report moved by Jerry Long and seconded by Sarah Melcher. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

Approval of Nomination Committee Report on pages 5-6 of Annual Report. Additions to the printed report were: Fellowship: Nancy McElroy and Connie Toops; Music & Fine Arts: Sara Lindgren and Frank Roxby; Peace and Justice: Maria Duprez. Additional nominations were asked from the floor. None received. Moved by Susan Moore and seconded by Lynn Jones. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

Cindy Woodling, member of the Endowment Committee, gave the report. Cindy recognized Rick McDaniel (chair), Larry Ream, and Roger Weiss who are rotating off the Committee. The Endowment began in 1974 with ten dollars and 2022 totals over two million dollars. Our Endowment investments are down from last year due to the stock market but is up from 2020. Cindy reminded that 4% of the Endowment balance in October is given to the budget for the following year; \$20,000 for Scholarship; \$30,000 in gifts were received. The United Church Funds manages the Endowments. Cindy encouraged members and friends to become part of the Legacy Society by putting the church in your will or estate. She thanked the 80 current members of the Legacy Society.

Jerry Long, chair of Budget, Finance, and Stewardship Team, was recognized to give an overview of the operating budget. He also shared the balance sheet information: endowment at \$2,310,000; investments at \$750,000; bank accounts \$191,000. He celebrated that we have no debt as a church.

Robin Reich, co-treasurer, reported that our total income was 103%. Contributions were 101% of budget; rental income was 160% budget; and investments were 999% of budget. Expenses were 94% of budget. Staffing was 97%; programs 78%, and operations 101% due to tree trimming after the hurricane. We had \$63,657 in surplus income.

Dale Woodling, co-treasurer, reported on 2023 budget income of \$755,957. 78% is from intention of giving. He reviewed changes from 2022 to 2023. Robin Reich reported on 2023 expenses.

Questions were asked about finances. Motion was made to approve financials for 2022 and budget for 2023 by Gib Mitchell, seconded by Jerry Long. Majority approved, one opposed, motion carries.

By-law revisions were presented by Jim Butterworth motion to accept by Gib Mitchell, seconded Sarah Melcher. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

Jim Butterworth recognized Carol Fields, past moderator, for her 3-years of service. Gavel was passed from Jim Butterworth to Nancy Morris. Nancy Morris adjourned the meeting at 1:00 PM.

Necrology 2023

Edwin "Eddie" Brickner	Norma Fuller	Ruth Hermann
Rowena Janssens	Gail & Keith Johnson	Carol Jeanine Johnston
Harold Kuhn	Beverly Laier	Marge Lothian
John Mange	Lorraine E. Matthews	Bill Moore
Pat Myers	Robert "Bob" Phelps	Jeanette Potts
Myron Robinson	Gene Rump	Marilyn Shipman
Millie Small	Ed Tjarks	Lavilla Watson
Janice Wood	Bryan Zuerner	

2022 Membership Report

Membership beginning January 1, 2023	382
 New members (full and associate)	 25
 Remove from rolls (full and associate)	 15
Deceased Full/Associate	<u>24</u>
Total Removals	39
 Total Membership year ending 2023	 362

Nominating Committee Report 2023

Moderator: Harold Mezile
Vice-Moderator: Carol McCloud
Immediate Past Moderator: Nancy Morris
Recording Secretary: Lynne Woodman
Treasurers: Robin Reich & Roxanne Schwoch

Members at Large ~*One representative from Creation Justice Covenant, Open & Affirming Covenant, Racial Justice Covenant, and Women's Fellowship*

Budget, Finance, & Stewardship

Ed Andersen
Bill Brackett
Sue Fields
Gib Mitchell
Steve Combs
Michael Johnston
Dale Woodling
Roxanne Schwoch (ex-officio)
Robin Reich (ex-officio)

Facilities & Grounds

Dave Abel
Chris Cooper
Don Hoy
Carol Fields
David Kerrigan
Bill Plerhoples
Rich Rescigno
Bud Rives

Growing & Caring

Kyle Booth
Jane Delgado-Semedi
Joy Kuhn
Susan Moore
Carol Seltzer
Shelly Taylor

Worship

Carol Hagglund
Elaine Hallice
Frank Hallice
Matt Jacobs
Peggye Mezile
Jeannie Mitchell
Becky Rives

Fellowship & Special Events

Buck Greenlaw
Mary Kukainis
Nancy McElroy
Nancy Morris
Barbara Ralph
Sandy Smith
Connie Toops

Mission Team

Jan Andersen
Terri Crawford
Evelyn Crooks
Gretchen Friend-Jones
John Ristow
Toska Strong
Nancy Taylor

Music & Fine Arts Team

Ray Baker
Donna Booth
Lucy Hedrick
Jane Hunder
Jim Hunder
Frank Roxby
Jeff Smith
Greg Chestnut (ex-officio)

Peace & Justice Team

Lee Brockmann
Maria Duprez
Laurie Etter
Carol Hagglund
Carolyn Habel
Carol Rescigno
Barbara Smith-Bacon
Lucy Tobias

Staffing

Dennis Crooks
Dick Miller (Chair)
Linda Pursley
Clarence Rogers

Green Team

Cheryl Beller
Jim Butterworth
Pamela Gore-Meade
Alleyne Kess
Lisa MacBlane
Nancy McElroy
Sarah Melcher
Susan Moore
Gary Pike

Spiritual Education & Growth

Jim Crumel
Julia Detoff
Liz Early
Donna Papenhausen
Erik Tredel
Lori White
Lois Wilkins

Endowment

Steve Combs
Hal Kamm
Jerry Long
Deb Methany-Hays
Gib Mitchell
Nancy Morris (ex-officio)

COLLAGE Advisory

Pauline Geary
Deb Hays
Michael Keane
Marilyn Lewis
Sandi Armstrong

Racial Justice Mission Group

Jim Crumel
Sheila Gossett
Lindsey Huddleston
Florence Jackson
Gregg Matthews
Lynne Woodman
Lois Wilkins

Pastor's Annual Report 2023

Renovation, revitalization, and exhilaration ~ these are the three words that stir in my heart as we complete 10 years of ministry together. First, in 2023 we **renovated** the sanctuary as well as spaces in the Outreach Building and areas around campus. We continue to thank **Bud Rives** and the **whole Facilities and Grounds Team** for the tireless energy they pour into making our church into a warm welcoming safe space. We are blessed by people who love to paint, clean, and take care of the campus as they do their own home. We renovated our **Core Values**, which were over 10 years old. Our new Core Values of **justice, worship, welcome, caring, belonging, and faithfulness** are elastic and expansive. These words can evolve in the coming years to meet the unknowable future. I look forward to seeing how our church can creatively embody these words for the sake of others near and far.

In addition to watching the dust fly literally and figuratively, 2023 was a year of **revitalization**. We gathered for worship in person and online each Sunday, we received new members, a group read the entire Bible in a year, Easter and Christmas attendance inched closer to pre-pandemic numbers. I witnessed faithful questions being asked and loving support offered that did not always remove the hurt, but let the person know that s/he is never alone. I felt each week a sweet spirit swirling among you. It was appropriate to have our Stewardship theme be, "I am so excited..." because I truly am passionate about our future together.

Finally, there is an **exhilaration** hovering/hanging in the air about the coming year as we celebrate our 70th anniversary. You may know that the traditional gift for that anniversary is platinum. But the true gift of our church is our connection to God, each other, and our neighbors. I pray that God's love will be experienced and encountered throughout the year to come.

I know I am blessed beyond words by an amazing staff: Greg Chestnut, Pamela Gansch-Boythe, Heidie Heath, Sherry Glover, Douglas Kingsley, & Mark Swain. I am blessed by a caring, faithful, and loving group of leaders. Our moderators are incredible: Jim Butterworth, Nancy Morris, Harold Mezile and now we warmly welcome Carol McCloud as Vice Moderator for 2024. Robin Reich and Dale Woodling have faithfully served as co-treasurers. There are untold volunteer hours that go into making our church run faithfully. It is my prayer that in the coming year we will continue to renovate, revitalize, and let loose the light of faith that burns brightly within us all. You are a blessed and pilgrim people who continue to share God's presence in remarkable ways. Prayers that 2024 guides us faithfully forward into the coming 70 years.

With deep gratitude for the joy of being your pastor and love ~ Wes

Moderator Report 2023

As I reflect on the last few years, I must express my thanks to you for the opportunity to serve as your Moderator. This past year I was blessed to work with Harold Mezile, Vice Moderator and Jim Butterworth Immediate Past Moderator and in 2022 Carol Fields, Past Moderator. Our year began with the theme "We've A Story to Tell" reflecting on the past 69 years as a congregation. Our story continues and in 2024 we will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of First Congregational United Church of Christ, Sarasota, FL.

At the Leadership Retreat last January, we focused on the Core Values of our church and looked at the ways in which we have grown over the years since our Core Values were last reviewed. As a result, a committee lead by Jim Butterworth was formed to wordsmith the current Core Values. In December, the Church Council approved the revisions presented by the committee and in January the congregation will have the opportunity to talk about them at fellowship time. Sanctuary Renovations that began in July and were completed in September were ably led by Bud Rives and his committee of Greg Chestnut, Carol Fields, Marsha Knight, Becky Rives, and Designer Janet Pedersen. We are indebted to Bud for his leadership on this project. Not only was it completed on time but came in under budget. During the renovations, Worship was held in Syster Hall.

Pastor Wes continues to feed us with a worship experience that uplifts our souls. In addition to our Sunday worship, he leads Bible Study twice a week and this year a study on Reading the Bible is One Year was completed. His daily morning meditations are available on Facebook and Pastor Wes's blog.

Live streaming of our services under the able direction of Douglas Kingsley our media technician, continues to be offered weekly at 11 o'clock and for special services.

Our worship though music led by Greg Chestnut was highlighted with the Artist in Residence program in March featuring Dr. Eric Nelson. Our special services were highlighted with guest instrumentalists and Greg at the organ accompanying our choir. Drumming as a Sacred Practice was offered bi-weekly by Greg,

Our three Covenants; Collage, Green Team, and Racial Justice offered programs to the congregation and played an active role in keeping us informed on various issues.

The Mission work of the congregation was evident not only by special offerings so well planned by the Mission Team but through others also. We became members of Bread for the World and had a special Sunday to highlight it at fellowship time.

As you read the team reports I am sure you will agree with me that we are an amazing congregation. We have accomplished so much in our 69 years and have much to celebrate in our 70th year.

As I look ahead to 2024 as Past Moderator, I look forward to working with Harold Mezile as Moderator and Carol McCloud as Vice Moderator.

With a Grateful Heart ~ Nancy Morris, Moderator.

Facilities & Grounds Report 2023

Facilities and Grounds activities during 2023 were sandwiched around one major effort: the **Sanctuary Enhancement Project:**

- The Design Team of Greg Chestnut, Carol Fields, Marcia Knight and Becky Rives, working with Janet Pederson Interior Design, selected tiles and pew cushion fabric and approved the installation layout.
- Tile was ordered in June and in July work began in earnest. Staff and members of the congregation set up Syster Hall for worship, contractors removed and stored pews, and old tile and baseboard were removed.

- New tile and baseboard and a new T-Loop were installed, pews reset, the sanctuary and contiguous space cleaned from top to bottom, and furnishings returned to their original locations.
- A concerted effort by volunteers from the congregation allowed us get everything done in time to dedicate the Sanctuary on Sunday, September 17, 2023, despite the intervention of a hurricane!

Working with the Green Team and Sunshine Community Composting, F&G approved a location for an **on-site composting operation**, which has since doubled in size.

Displays for **banners** showing worship hours and values messages were installed in front of the church.

F&G continued to work with the Solar Task Force to investigate the feasibility of using **solar power** to electrify a portion of the campus. This work continues as we reach out to Brilliant Harvest to help evaluate the infrastructure modifications and costs involved. F&G's focus on energy savings also included the addition of "**smart**" **thermostats** in several locations around the campus.

The extreme heat, drought, and watering restrictions took a toll on our air conditioning, irrigation system, landscaping and equipment.

- Major repairs were made to **A/C units** in the sanctuary, Outreach Room 6/7 and Syster Hall.
- The **Syster Hall kitchen A/C was replaced** as scheduled by the Long-Range Financial Plan.
- **Irrigation system control valves** for the east side of the campus were replaced.
- The **riding mower** required a number of significant repairs.

The campus has, so far, survived the drought fairly well. A major **plant bed enhancement project** is underway. Working with a team consisting of F&G and Green Team members, we have engaged the services of a consultant who specializes in native plants. The goal is to make our campus more beautiful, "Florida Friendly," and sustainable.

We closed out 2023 with the renovation of the **Outreach Building kitchenette**. This effort was led by Page and Carol McCloud and includes new cabinets and countertops plus a new refrigerator and microwave.

The F&G Team accomplishments in 2023 also included myriad landscape, painting, repair, and minor improvement projects, too numerous to list! Members of the F&G have worked hard to improve our campus environment. We thank all of you who have so generously given your time to help when it was needed.

Bud Rives, Chair

Fellowship & Special Events Report 2023

The stated mission of the Fellowship and Special Events Team is to plan and support events that create opportunities for fellowship, enjoyment and social interaction within the congregation and offer a welcome to visitors and newcomers. We continued Coffee Hour Fellowship time after the 11am worship service on the first and third Sundays of the month. Each month a different leadership team/teams hosted and provided the refreshments. For now, this schedule will continue although the assigned monthly host teams are invited and encouraged to host on additional available Sundays.

We were also able to offer some special events. In March we invited the congregation to attend and participate in our Annual (hopefully) Chili Cookoff. Ten talented chefs competed with their very best chili, and Connie Toops was our prizewinner. During the summer we had an ice cream social offering a variety of ice cream treats. In the fall we had a “Welcome Back Picnic” offering fried chicken and picnic-themed accompanying dishes provided by members of the congregation.

I thank all the leadership team members for their help and participation along with the members of the congregation who donated food items and/or joined us for fellowship. I also thank my Fellowship Team members Buck Greenlaw, Mary Kukainis, Nancy McElroy, Nancy Morris, Barbara Ralph, and Connie Toops for their help in planning our events. We welcome anyone who would like to join us – “The Fun Team” in 2024.

Respectfully yours, Sandy Smith, Fellowship and Special Events Chair

Budget, Finance & Stewardship Report 2023

The Budget, Finance & Stewardship (B,F&S) Team, consisting of Gib Mitchell (chair), Ed Andersen, Bill Brackett, Steve Combs, Pauline Geary, Joy Kuhn, Sue Fields, and our co-treasurers Robin Reich, and Dale Woodling had a very productive 2023 thanks to the tremendous generosity of our congregation. As reflected in the 2023 Income & Expense Statement, contribution income, including pledges and anonymous and unpledged contributions, exceeded projected budget levels by more than \$28,000. Total income for the year exceeded budget projections by over \$37,000 due not only to increased contributions, but higher than budgeted investment and room rental income.

On the expense side, staffing, program and operations expenses all came in under budget. Total expenses were more than \$56,000 under budget with most of those savings being in the program category. The greater than budgeted total income and the less than budgeted total expenses resulted in surplus income (total income minus total expenses) for the year of more than \$92,000.

The B,F&S team had a number of major initiatives during the year. The first was to work closely with the Facilities & Grounds team to provide funding from the Major Expense Reserve

for the church's sanctuary renovation project. Thanks to exceptionally detailed planning by the project leader, Bud Rives, the renovation was completed under budget.

The second was to review the church's insurance through the UCC Insurance Board because of the continuing rise in insurance costs that are already 44% of the church's operations budget. In doing its review, the Team found that the church's property had not been re-appraised for the past three years. Because this three-year period had been a time of relatively high inflation, the team felt a re-appraisal was warranted. The team completed an updated inventory of the church's property and equipment and obtained an updated appraisal. At year end, the team was working with the Insurance Board to determine insurance costs based on the updated appraisal.

The third initiative was to ensure that income from the church's cash reserves was maximized in a safe and effective manner. In this regard, the Team worked with Morgan Stanley to build a CD ladder which generally yielded more the 5.3% interest for 2023. The Team also moved idle funds into the Morgan Stanely Preferred Savings accounts that, at year end, were yielding 5% interest. As a result, the church realized over \$27,000 in income from its FDIC-insured investments, a significant increase from a few years ago.

The final initiative was the year-end stewardship drive based on the theme, "I am so excited about this church because ...". The stewardship team created videos and sought in-church testimonies from church members and others on this theme. The result was a highly successful drive where pledges received exceeded the goal set by the team.

In summary, the work of the B,F&S team was made easier in 2023 by an exceptionally generous congregation that clearly loves and supports this church financially as well as spiritually.

Growing & Caring Report 2023

- Using the Communications Survey results, we identified several "Communications Angels" within our church to help our team recognize birthdays, special occasions and prayers needed.
- Carol Seltzer interviewed Kathi Taylor (designer of our altar cross) and Greg Chestnut to capture the history of our cross.
- We provided the angel saints for our "Tree of Life" for All Saints Day remembrance.
- Welcome Bags for first-time visitors have been reintroduced.
- Those with 90+ Wise Birthdays are included in the Mid-Week messages and newsletter and recognized by our team and other "Communications Angels".
- Nancy Arnzen, Kathy Combs, Priscilla Crumel, Carol Hagglund, and Carol McCloud will continue reaching out to members on their Care Teams even though they are no longer active members of Growing & Caring.

- Our 2024 members are: Kyle Booth, Jane Delgado-Semidei, Joy Kuhn, Susan Moore, Carol Seltzer, and Shelly Taylor. Carol McCloud will be the moderator representative. Special thanks to Pastor Wes who attends every meeting and to Jim Butterworth our moderator representative in 2023.
- In 2023 we welcomed 25 new members. Two of these members joined virtually!

Missions Report 2023

The main focus of the Mission Team continues to be Christmas Love and Easter Love Offerings. Christmas Love supports local charities and Easter Love supports national and international charities as well as the UCC church to keep us a 5 by 5 church. In the summer we fundraise for our neighbor Alta Vista Elementary. In 2022 we raised 39,000 for these three groups and in 2023 we raised 40,293 dollars. One of our members Gretchen Friend Jones made centerpieces for Sarasota Point our neighboring nursing home.

In addition to our ongoing projects we donated 600 dollars to Orchard Place so they could provide Christmas Dinner to their clientele. We supported joining Bread for the World and one of our members Nancy Taylor joined the committee to promote this. The Peace and Justice team is taking Bread for the World under their wing now as well as the monthly community meal for the homeless. We look forward to welcoming three new members to the mission team in 2024 - Evelyn Crooks, Toska Strong and John Ristow. We are sorry to be losing Jan Kamm who has been a great team member the last four years.

Music & Fine Arts Report 2023

It has once again been a busy year for our Music and Fine Arts.

Beginning in February we were excited to host Eric Nelson as our Artist in Residence. What a joy for the choir to experience Eric and his teachings. Holy Week was a beautiful time of reflection through music and word. Thanksgiving and Christmas Services were, as always inspiring which included brass, harp and tympani from the Sarasota Orchestra. The beauty of our Chapel shown brightly with candlelight on November 24th, as we welcomed the return of "Sorello Duo," (Natalie and Rebecca Helm). Our Music Sunday on December 17th, the choir performed Daniel Pinkham's "Gloria" and John Rutter's "Gloria." This also included instrumentalists from the Sarasota Orchestra. Always a special celebration, Christmas Eve brought us the beautiful music of Betsy and Fernando Traba at our 4:00 service, with Natalie Helm, Meghan Jones and Phoebe Powell sharing their gifts at our 7:00 and 11:00 services.

Many thanks to Douglas Kingsley for his expertise in our livestreaming, audio and visual.

I am so very thankful to all who serve on the Music and Fine Arts Team, and to Greg Chestnut for his leadership.

Peace & Justice Report 2023

The P&J Team continues to advocate for Justice through groups and activities as listed below. In 2023, the Food and Hunger Group - an umbrella group under P&J auspices - was formed.

BRADY SARASOTA: Carol Rescigno

- Continues to hold Bayfront rallies on Thursdays at 4 pm, Oct-May.
- Joined other local organizations, including our church, in getting the City Commission to proclaim June Gun Violence Awareness Month. Our church also held its own Wear Orange Sunday in June.
- The 7th Annual Vigil for Victims was held at our church in December with many participants and attendees from our church.

Food & Hunger Group: Michael Keane & Ellen Marsey (with Carol Hagglund reporting to P&J)

The Food and Hunger Group was formed this year as an umbrella group to provide oversight and coordinate efforts relating to issues of hunger and food insecurity. The Group reports to P&J and budgets for Bread for the World and Community Meal now appear under P&J.

Accomplishments in 2023 included:

- Bread for the World (church membership, lobbying letters, education)
- All Faiths Food Bank (restarted 1st Sunday of the month collections)
- Community Meal (once a month meals prepared by our church and served at St. Paul Lutheran Church)
- Family Promise (coordinate with them for food collections and fundraiser)
- Second Chance Last Opportunity (coordinate with them for periodic food collections)

Project 180: In 2023, activities supporting Project 180 included:

- Helping to organize two donations to Project 180's backpack program: 1) a monetary donation by the Men's Breakfast group, and 2) in-kind donations by the congregation.
- Organizing a table of 10 for the October "Strong Voices" educational luncheon and fundraiser.
- Coordinating the cost of the paint for P-180's new Outreach building space paid for through the Church Council Contingency Fund.

SURE: Laurie Etter

Despite over 18 months of staff turnover and no staff, SURE continues its very important work for justice in Sarasota County. Under the passionate leadership of new Lead Organizer Mackensie Grimes and Executive Director Ryan McBride, SURE has been working hard to rebuild the organization while continuing to work on important justice issues. SURE voted to focus on Affordable and Attainable Housing in the Community Problems meeting.

Miscellaneous:

- Placed a letter to the editor of the Herald Tribune, which was also mailed to all relevant legislators, to protest the forced policy and staff transitions at New College.
- Coordinated church member attendance at an early on-campus rally at New College.

- Coordinated Council approval for our church to sign on to the Florida Conference letter regarding recent Florida legislation and actions relating to libraries, DEI, LGBTQ+ and more.
- Continued sending emails to those on the Peace & Justice Network email list to inform them of potential action on various justice-based policy matters.
- Updated the Peace & Justice Team profile of previously taken and ongoing justice matters in the Team's orbit.

Peace & Justice Members: Lee Brockmann, Maria Duprez, Laurie Etter, Carolyn Habel Carol Hagglund, Carol Rescigno, Barbara Smith-Bacon, and Lucy Tobias

Food & Hunger Group Members: Jim Butterworth, Carol Hagglund (reports to P&J), Michael Keane (co-leader), Ellen Marsey (co-leader), Nancy Taylor

Spiritual Education & Growth Report 2023

The Spiritual Education and Growth Team, recently merged with the Oasis Team, had another active year. We are continuing to grow our Oasis Center for Reflection and Renewal. This year we continued to support the weekly gatherings of Sacred Conversations on Race led by Jim Crumel and two Bible studies led by Pastor Wes. We also supported a group led by Pastor Wes who read the Bible in a year. We continued to support the twice a month gathering for Drumming as a Spiritual Practice led by Greg Chestnut. We supported the Artful Prayer Group's monthly gatherings led by Cindy Woodling and others. We hosted FEAST classes in March focusing on Artful Prayer and Sacred Conversations on Race. In 2023, the Oasis Center hosting Mapping Your Life in January, a reading of the play *Our Town* in June, and a book conversation on *Christianity for the Rest of Us* in October. We reviewed scholarship applications and were able to award several. We followed up with Fall semester midterm encouragement letters signed by many congregation members plus a gift for the students. As a team, we worked on providing input to the church-wide project to update our core values statement. We look forward to 2024 continuing to find ways we can grow our faith as a church.

Staffing Report 2023

Staffing Team members were Dennis Crooks, Dick Miller, Linda Pursley and Clarence Rogers. Condition of Employment Job Descriptions have been updated as needed to reflect staffing reconfigurations. In particular, the position of Business Manager was eliminated and Financial Clerk was added. Each COE were reviewed with Staff members during annual reviews. Presently, there are three full-time staff members: Senior Minister Wes Bixby, Minister of Music Greg Chestnut and Campus Manager, Mark Swain. Part-time positions are Office Administrator Sherry Glover, Media Specialist Douglas Kingsley, Bookkeeper Pam Gansch-Boythe, Financial Clerk Heidie Heath and four Choir Section Leaders.

Special thanks go to Robin Reich, Dale Woodling and Sue Fields for training financial staff, and to Nancy Morris, Carol McCloud, Jane Hunder and Connie Toops who volunteered in the office when needed throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted ~ Dick Miller

Worship Team 2023

The team reviewed and made suggestions for the revision of the Core Values, Vision and Mission Statements. We continued to work on our team goals. One was to clarify the overlap between the worship aspect of the church service and the incorporation of the covenants in the design of the service on significant days such as Earth Day, Juneteenth, and Pride Sunday. Covenant representatives attended our meetings to give input and to make sure representative holidays were recognized either through prayers, poems, music, talks or sermons. Another goal was to find additional ways for more participation in the worship service by members of the congregation which happened through involvement of members in services on holidays as well as significant dates related to the covenants.

We continued to discuss masking and seat restrictions and recommended to Council that seating restrictions be dropped.

A team member continued to be a representative on the Safety Committee. Decisions by the Safety Committee were incorporated in the guidelines for the ushers and greeters. Training for both ushers and greeters took place on these guidelines.

We worked on services during Lent, including recommending one service on Ash Wednesday with the chapel being open from 12-1:00 for drop in with soft music, printed devotional materials and ashes available. Further we helped design the services for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

We also had to make decisions about services during Advent and on Christmas Eve morning. The team chose the topic *Christmas around the World* and designed a service in conjunction with Pastor Wes and Greg Chestnut for the third Sunday in Advent.

We continue to investigate ways to handle communion. We will develop and send a survey to the congregation at the beginning of 2024 to get a sense of what congregants prefer and to help us set up a procedure going forward.

Endowment Committee Report 2023

ENDOWMENT FISCAL YEAR (FY) ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2023 The church Endowment was established in 1973 with \$10. At the end of FY 2023 the total Endowment was in excess of \$2.7 million (\$1.69 million in the Undesignated Endowment and \$1.09 million in designated Funds). The church Endowment is guided by a Trust Agreement and Church Bylaws.

Undesignated Endowment Fund Distributions in FY 2023

In accordance with the church bylaws, the undesignated portion of the endowment fund distributes 4% annually to the church income line. In October 2023, total of \$54,854 was distributed from the FY 2022 year-end undesignated funds balance to the 2023 church income

line. Based on 2023 fiscal year-end balance the amount approved for distribution to the 2024 church budget is \$67,750.

Designated Fund Distributions in 2023

\$17,660 of the total Scholarship Funds (General Scholarship and York-Ellwood)

\$2400 of the Family Emergency Fund

\$7500 of the Greg Chestnut Music Fund

Gifts to the Endowment Fund in 2023

Graham and Pat Barkhuff Estate - \$90,429

Margo Light - \$25,000 Live Legacy Gift

Legacy Society

The Legacy Society was started in 2015 with 35 members. There are currently 99 members who have notified the church they have made a planned gift or live gift to the Endowment Fund. Endowment Sunday is planned for March 17, 2024.

FY Yearly Endowment Balance Comparison past five years (FY ending Sep 30)

2019	\$1,721,575
2020	\$2,208,896
2021	\$2,858,221
2022	\$ 2,310,082
2023	\$2,792,395

Legacy Society Members:

Anonymous (4)

Vince Amoroso * & Tam Milton

Pat * & Graham* Barkhuff

Dr. Fred* & Lee Brockmann

Fred Clark *

Fran Collier *

Dennis and Evelyn Crooks

Pauline Geary

Richard * & Debbie Hayes

Bill and Pat Grubb

Drs. Marsha Kindall-Smith & Hugh Smith

Mary Kukainis

Vonda Leonard

Warren Bacon & Barbara Smith-Bacon

Joan Beach *

Greg Chestnut

Craig Collemer

Phyllis Collins *

Helaine Eckstein

Carol Hagglund

Lucy Hedrick

Lynn Jones

Billie Knauss*

Bev Laier

Dr. Sara Little and Barbara Shaver

Bruce* and Judy Macgowan*
Ginny McIntire *
Bill* & Susan Moore
Nancy Morris
Felix and Nancy McElroy
Susan Raines
Myron* & Brenda Robinson
Betty Rundlett
Carol Seltzer
Ann Stormzand *
Audrey Shutters
Minton* & Sandra Tinsley
Roger & Ellie* Weiss
Lori White
Dr. June Wolgemuth
Bruce Woolley

Rick & Patrice McDaniel
David & Susan Mitchell
Rev. Dale Moore & Dr. Steve Horowitz
Len & Drue Murray
Dr. Richard Miller
Larry & Charlaine* Ream
Gregg Royer *
John* & Connie Schaefer
Joan Sheil
Rev. Dr. Jean & Paul* Simpson
Lucia Taylor*
Jean Walker
Bill Wendling* & Lynne Woodman
Elizabeth Wildhack
Dale and Cindy Woodling
David York

* = Deceased

The statement of Endowment fund activity for First Congregational UCC ~ year ending December 31, 2023 can be found in the printed/paper budget financials. Please contact the church office to receive.

Annual Report ~ Racial Justice Mission Group

The Racial Justice Mission Group was established in 2022. Our goals were:

1. Establish a Racial Justice Covenant that reflects the rich history and tradition of our congregation.
2. Develop opportunities to help us increase our understanding of the biblical principles of justice and love of neighbor and the history and impact of racial injustice.
3. Partner with the Church's two other covenant groups: Creation Justice and Open and Affirming.

The Racial Justice Covenant has served as a context for many constructive and ongoing conversations within our congregation as well as with the larger community. The Covenant continues to serve as a platform for expanded activities promoting racial justice among our congregation and with our community partners. This led to deeper understandings within the church and several successful engagements with strategic partners. All with the goal of promoting racial justice.

- ❖ Dialogues with other church partners, including the Florida UCC Conference, about support and sharing best practices for growing a racial justice awareness and strategies to combat racial injustice. We expect this to continue to bear fruit in 2024.

- ❖ Personal testimonies/recognition during worship: Warren Bacon, Lindsey Huddleston and David Wilkins during Black History Month; Jim Butterworth, Connie Toops, and Evelyn and Dennis Crooks during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month; Gregg Matthews on Juneteenth Sunday; Lindsey Huddleston read a statement written by John Ristow to honor our Indigenous ancestors in FL on Indigenous Peoples' Day 10/8/23; Lois and David Wilkins and Jim Crumel shared information about the powerful aspects of Kwaanza and how it has philosophical ties to all major religions.
- ❖ Tour of Florida Indigenous Peoples' art and Sarasota African American art at the Ringling Museum 4/17/23. Eight people attended.
- ❖ ROSA PARKS: BEYOND THE BUS by H H Leonards, author and personal friend of Rosa Parks. This was an illustrated lecture and book signing on 7/16/23. Eighty people, including guests, attended.
- ❖ Native Blanket Ceremony: A free interactive workshop with lunch honoring FL Indigenous peoples' history and culture led by a group from the Windermere Union Church (Orlando) on 11/4/23. Fifty people, including guests, attended.
- ❖ Began interviews of African American congregation members to capture the church's rich history of Racial Justice.
- ❖ Day bus trip with lunch and a docent's tour of the Dr. Carter J. Woodson African American Museum of Florida in St Petersburg on 12/1/23 with 16 church congregants
- ❖ Commissioned Carol Fields to create a full page church program ad for the 2024 Gamma Xi Boule Valentine's Day Gala to raise scholarship money and provide memberships to African American youth
- ❖ Approved a Racial Justice Mission Group banner designed by Carol Fields to be displayed in front of the church
- ❖ Continues to build the RJMG resource center materials
- ❖ Continues to work closely with the church's other two covenant groups.

The Racial Justice Mission Group sincerely thanks the congregation for the emotional, intellectual and monetary support for our efforts. As we move into 2024 we will continue to foster understanding, partnership and to paraphrase the later Senator John Lewis, promote "Good Actions".

Jim Crumel, Sheila Gossett, Florence Jackson, Felix McElroy, Gregg Matthews, Lynne Woodman, CoChairs Warren Bacon and Lindsey Huddleston

Annual Report 2003 – Creation Justice

The Creation Justice Team/Green Team was very busy in 2023. One goal was to expand the supply of books for their Library cart, a cart which can be rolled to any location so that people will have access to reading materials focused on creation and environmental sustainability. The acquisitions for 2023 focused primarily but not exclusively on books about solar power.

Sarah Melcher, in partnership with Rev. Dr. Robert Shore-Goss, presented a workshop at the Florida Conference's Annual Gathering on "Green Preaching." These two are currently writing a book on Preaching the Earth Lectionary.

The Green Team helped with planning for worship services integrating liturgy focused on Creation Justice.

The Green Team successfully continued with composting program on campus in partnership with Sunshine Community Compost. Fifteen households are currently participating. The New York Times stated in a recent article that household food waste is one of the greatest contributors to air pollution, greater even than commercial air travel, so we see this as a very important issue.

The Green Team worked with Facilities & Grounds on new native plantings in the Butterfly Garden, and on labeling the specimens in the Garden. The Green Team participated in a Saturday clean up day on the campus. Members of the Green Team agreed with Facilities & Grounds to continue to explore Solar Energy alternatives on our campus.

Six members of the Green Team, including the incoming chair for 2024, attended the Eco-Summit held at the Van Wezel in December 2023. It was very well done, and it inspired some thinking for new initiatives.

COLLAGE 2023

PAULINE GEARY & MARILYN LEWIS – CO-FACILITATORS

Deborah Hays, Mike Keane, and John Ristow – Advisory Team

- Purchased, reviewed, and catalogued LGBTQIA+ books for the church library.
- Staffed booths for Community Outreach at Manatee County Pride, Silver Pride, Sarasota Pride and New College Pride.
- Provided gift cards to Ringling College Queer Closet for clothing for transgender students and to New College Pride Raffle.
- Sponsored Field Trip to St. Petersburg Allendale Church to meet Drag Artists participating in worship service.
- Updated Brochure and Video
- Purchased and distributed LOVE IS LOUDER t-shirts as well as attractive table cover for use during community outreach.
- Facilitated ONA discussion group at FL Annual Conference.
- Sponsored monthly luncheons with featured speakers and group discussions.
- Sponsored Equality FL Suncoast Fund Raiser.
- Recognized Transgender Day of Remembrance and World Aids Day.
- Sponsored field trip to ALSO Youth facility for tour and presentation by staff about ALSO Ambassador Program.
- Met several times with Samaritan Counseling and other churches regarding mutual support opportunities.
- Continued bi-monthly gatherings on ZOOM and then changed to Hybrid options.
- LGBTQIA+ grief group begun by Cas Burleson.

Lay Visitation Ministry 2023 Annual Report

*“Listening is the act of entering the skin of the other and wearing it for a time as if it were our own. Listening is the gateway to understanding.” — David Spangler in *Parent as Mystic, Mystic as Parent**

The purpose of the Lay Visitation Ministry Team is to be truly present and actively listen to the members and friends of our congregation who are generally unable to attend worship and other church events and/or find themselves in a nursing home, rehabilitation center, hospital, or hospice house. We seek to be truly present and listen deeply to the members of our congregation who we visit, telephone, and reach out to in a variety of other ways. Often these individuals long for someone to simply listen with compassion and a caring heart. Deep listening is a precious gift we can freely give one another.

The Lay Visitation Ministry Team continues to reach out to the members and friends of our church family who are confined to their home, in a nursing, rehabilitation, assisted living facility or a patient in a hospital or hospice facility and generally unable to attend worship and other activities at the church or they currently experiencing a difficult time in their life. These visits are a *ministry of presence and deep listening* wherein we bring the love of God and the congregation to these individuals and/or their families. During 2023 we were able to return to personal visits as we have emerged from the worst of the Covid pandemic. It has been wonderful to be able to once again be physically present to our church members who are often isolated from the church community.

Another dimension to our ministry is led by Sara Little who has organized a monthly mailing of over 50 cards with a message/prayer from Pastor Wes to each person on our list. With the help of other members of our team, this effort has shown to be a wonderful way for our church family to reach out in a tangible way to those unable to join us for worship or other church events.

Our team continued to meet monthly for a two-hour time of education, support, and reflection in person and via Zoom. Our time together consists of an opening devotional, remembering church members who have passed from this life to their eternal life with God, a time for Pastor Wes to share with the members, checking-in with each member regarding the visits/contacts they have made in the past month, and a time of spiritual reflection and inspiration. Everything shared in our monthly gatherings is kept in the strictest confidence.

In partnership with our church’s prayer shawl ministry team we are able to bring shawls to those we visit as another tangible way of bringing the love of our congregation to these members. We are grateful for the work of the prayer shawl ministry and their working with us to spread God’s love.

We are pleased that at the end of 2023 we added three new members to our team. The members of LVM team are: Janet Baker, Julia Detloff, Hal Kamm, Alleyne Kess, Sherry Mange, Dick Miller, David Pitt, Maggie Revere, Barbara Shaver, with Craig Collemer and Sara Little as the co-leaders. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of Pastor Wes at our monthly gatherings and throughout each month.

First Congregational UCC Women of Sarasota 2023 Annual Report

The first UCC Women is open to all members of the church. They meet in Syster Hall on the first Tuesday of the month from October to May for fellowship, luncheon, and a program. The monthly programs give opportunity for attendees to get first-hand information about many of the non-profits and helping agencies that work in the community for the betterment of the environment, homeless, and current societal problems that are prevalent. These are well received with an average attendance of 30-40 plus each month.

We had the honor of having one of our own, Nancy Morris, be selected as Lay Women of 2023 in May at the UCC Florida Regional Conference. It was a joy to highlight all of the areas of work and faithful service that Nancy provides.

One of the highlights at the December meeting is to fill and wrap shoeboxes for seniors. We gave 40 boxes to Orchard Place and the rest to Meals on Wheels with a total of 81 boxes for distribution. The Memorial Committee hosted several receptions following the Celebration of Life service for departed members of the church. The famous memorial punch and desserts are provided by the committee. As in the past, First UCC women, through the generosity of its members were able to contribute over \$6000 to nonprofits for mission work. We also purchased the covers for the pew attendance pads in the sanctuary. Respectfully Submitted ~ Connie Toops, President.

Security Team Annual Report

The security team has held several meetings, given reports to Council and the Congregation. Some of our team attended a webinar hosted by the FL UCC Conference. Within the past month 2 UCC congregations in CA & Ohio were targeted and attacked by 'hate groups' for sponsoring drag shows. One church was even firebombed with Molotov cocktails, and both have been attacked & maligned by white nationalist organizations. The security team reviewed the feedback from our congregation and worked with the SPD to develop instructions on how we should respond to any unexpected incidents in our church to protect our church family. SPD complimented us on the instructions we prepared and agreed to make us aware of any intelligence they receive on potential hate threats that may be directed at our church.

Instructions have been developed on: What information to provide 911 Operators; What to do in case evacuation is necessary (i.e., fire, explosion); What to do if evacuation is not possible; How to respond when law enforcement/EMS arrives. Laminated copies of the instructions are available for individuals in leadership roles – Greeters in the Narthex, Pastor Wes & Greg Chestnut on the Altar. In the coming year, the Safety Team will: Continue our team meetings & maintain contact with SPD, Update the congregation on new instructions, Consider alternatives to safeguard our congregation, including: Recruit additional Greeters (presently have 19), Consider central door locking system (one-time expense of \$12k), Consider SPD extra duty officer program (annual expense of \$17k for 1 officer, 1 marked car from 8am-1pm each Sunday)

Respectfully submitted ~ Gregg Matthews