Unitarian Universalist
Congregation of Asheville

2023-2024 Annual Report



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From the Board of Trustees

Board of Trustees

Trustees typically serve a three-year term. The '23-'24 Board of Trustees consisted of the following members (in alphabetical order, by year in their terms):

Completing third year of term: Mary Alm (Clerk), Adam Griffith (VP), Margaret McAlister
Completing second year of term: Cliff Hall, Clyde Hardin** (President, in 2nd term), Will Jernigan*
Completing first year of term: Phil Hammond, Mara Sprain, Monica Youngman
Ex-officio member: Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson
**Cliff Hall resigned, term to be assumed by Juli Altschul. **Clyde Hardin resigning this year*

The Role of the Board of Trustees

Our Governance Document says that the Board of Trustees "sets governance policies that reflect the mission of the congregation and delegates the work of implementing the policies to the Executive." The Executive in our policy governance is our Lead Minister, and by extension, the Lead Minister's staff. The Board defines the Executive's goals – or "Ends" in Policy Governance lingo and directs the Executive to achieve those Ends. But that doesn't tell the whole story. This allows the Executive to operate relatively freely, subject to stated "Executive Limitations" (more Policy Governance lingo), also spelled out in our Governance Document. But, while allowing the Executive this freedom, there is also Governance Document-mandated cooperation between the Board and Executive. We're in this together to achieve our mission.

Our Monthly Meeting Routine

This year, the Board held regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, typically lasting for about two hours. Our agendas contain certain standing items that don't vary meeting-to-meeting. These items include opening and closing readings with a chalice lighting and extinguishing, short member personal check-ins, approval of the previous meeting's minutes, and a Process Observer's report at the end of our meetings.

We also receive and review Rev. Audette's Sharing Ministry Report, and Rev. Claudia's analogous Q' Pasa? Report, with RE input from Kim Collins and Jen Johnson. Both of these reports let the Board know what's going on in each minister's areas of responsibility. The Board thanks Rev. Audette, Rev. Claudia, Kim, and Jen for providing us with those reports, keeping the Board informed of the many, many things happening in our church community that we might not otherwise know about.

We also receive one or more scheduled "Executive Limitation" reports, typically compiled by our Administrator, Wendy Motch-Ellis (now resigned). These reports allow the Board to understand and monitor

what the Executive side (Lead Minister and Staff) is doing, in diverse areas ranging from financial control to communications with the Board and Congregation, to support and achieve our mission.
The remainder of this report – the important part – highlights a few things that are not part of the Board's usual monthly routine. They are organized as activities with a core theme, typically spanning months, or even years.

Beginning a New Ministry

From three-plus years ago, up to the beginning of this year, I think it's fair to say that the Board's activity was mainly concerned with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and our ministerial transition. This year marked the end of both the pandemic and our formal ministerial transition, and the beginning of Rev. Audette's ministry with us. I say, "the end," but the effects of both the pandemic and our transition period still reverberate in our congregation in the form of decreased membership, increased operating costs, and some general uncertainty around where our community is headed. The arrival of Rev. Audette, however, has given many of us new hope for the future as she integrates with the Board and the congregation at large. New ideas and new energy abound. She has jumped in with both feet, showing us new ways and helping us to tackle some of the issues that confront us. A healthy relationship between the Board and the Executive is a necessity in our governance model, and Rev. Audette has done the right things to help us develop that relationship. I look forward to what this new ministry can be.

Board Goals for '23-'24

During my tenure, we've always tried to be intentional about Board goals for the year. We typically do some sort of "retreat" – separate from our meetings and in a relaxed space, in a relaxed time. We've had varying degrees of success, often dependent on the retreat facilitator. My opinion is that this worked out better this year than previously. We primed the pump by using our regularly scheduled July meeting for a free-form conversation about goals, with no "interfering" business items allowed. That visioning discussion was followed by a prioritization at our August meeting of four items we thought were important to address this year: our aging campus, financial sustainability, racial justice work, and increasing membership and retaining visitors. These topics seeded our actual retreats (two held in October), facilitated by Rev. Audette. Those retreats boiled our major focuses down to financial stability and dealing with our aging campus, both of which fit into our "Four Pillars" strategy for fiscal sustainability developed last year. We still had (and have) work to do to keep us afloat financially, with deficit budgets and the need for dealing with our building still in front of us.

"Four Pillars" Efforts

The Four Pillars" strategy for fiscal sustainability, developed last year, consisted of efforts by four committees: (1) The Care Connect committee charged with keeping our current members connected and reaching out to the community to find new members, (2) the Annual Giving Drive committee, chaired by Board member Will Jernigan, (3) the Long Range Planning committee, and (4) our Legacy Circle committee. The Board's focus this year has been on fundraising, largely the province of the AGD committee, and dealing with our aging campus, the province of the LRP committee.

Fundraising

Our fundraising efforts are still largely vested in the AGD committee and the Auction Committee, both which ran very successful operations this year. Ideally, AGDs should not be almost exclusively a Board-led effort, which it has been the case for the last two years. That is not the Board's charge. I'm hoping that a standing committee can manage the AGD in the future, and that AGDs should be less of a "March and April only" event and more of a year-long process.



This year, Rev. Audette has introduced the Board to a new kind of fundraising activity – dubbed FUNraising – which are smaller-scale events which can be managed by a few people without massive efforts, perhaps focused on the larger community. These events could augment our usual AGD and Auction efforts, and perhaps bring funds in from outside the UU Asheville community. While the Board did not generate any FUNraising activities this year, our hope and expectation is that we will make these a regular part of our revenue-generating efforts in the coming years.

Long-Range Planning

The Long-Range Planning committee has stepped up to the challenge this year, and has started a process of helping the congregation decide what we should do with our aging campus. In particular, they have developed a multi-phased plan to answer the question of what to do with our entire campus – our main building, and both 21 and 23 Edwin, which are in need of repairs. 21 Edwin is currently unused, because of lead paint issues discovered this year. The first phase of the LRP's process is querying the congregation about their desires for our campus, via multiple cottage meetings. These meetings have started and will continue into next year. The LRP committee will interpret the cottage meeting results, and then research and present options for the congregation to consider. I hope everyone takes part in these discussions, since there are some big decisions ahead of us.

Other Board Efforts

Not all of the Board's efforts were focused on fiscal sustainability! We actually did do some things that don't go in that category. Several are listed below.



- *Racial Justice*

The Board continued to support, and try to facilitate, the implementation of Racial Justice Advisory (RJAC) recommendations, developed almost three years ago. Our racial justice (now termed "collective liberation") efforts, have morphed considerably. Our two ministers are both highly

invested in these efforts, and now seem to be guiding them along, integrated with other justice efforts. The upcoming Annual Meeting will include a Transparency, Equity and Accountability (TEA) report from Rev. Audette.

➢ *Communications with the Congregation*

The Board has been hoping to become more visible and "known" to the congregation, and hoping to know more about what the congregation is thinking and feeling about our church. The first effort in this direction, which I hope will continue and grow next year, are Board "Listening Circles". These are gatherings during coffee hour between the two services, for a few board members to engage in conversation with congregants about a particular topic. In February Moniva Youngman facilitated a Listening Circle on church engagement- what either helps you to be more engaged, or hinders your engagement, with church activities? Monica debriefed the Board on this interesting conversation. We plan for this to be a quarterly activity next year.

➢ *Internal Board Activities*

There are several Board activities that I'll classify as internal, tHese include things the Board does to improve its intended function. I'll only mention a few items.

Board Orientation: A Board Orientation is explicitly called out in our Governance Document as a requirement. This year, our orientation was the entire content of the June meeting, during which we presented an overview of our Policy Governance structure and a brief tutorial on Google Drive (mandated as our record-keeping technology). Because our governance is not widely understood, at least at the level a Board member should understand it, this is a valuable undertaking.

Board Work Sessions: This year, we added Board "work sessions" - short, optionally -called Zoom meetings on the 4th Tuesday of the month, to talk about or act on one, maybe two, topics as required or desired at the time. We had several this year, which saved regular meeting time and weren't overly painful for Board members to accommodate.

Having a Youth on the Board: We formed a task force to consider including, in some appropriate way, a youth representative on the Board. We did not make enough progress this year to either present a plan for this to the congregation or decide it was not appropriate, but we will continue these discussions. Watch for a possible bylaw amendment at the 2025 Annual Meeting!

Kudos: We instituted a standing agenda item for the Board to thank- i.e. deliver kudos- to congregants, staff or others who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to further the work of the congregation, any Board member with a kudo candidate brings a card for the Baird to sign and deliver to the deserving person.

Coordination with the LDC: Never done before this year (to my knowledge at least) was coordination with the Leadership Development Committee concerning what the Board needed out of the nominees for the new Board position, Thanks to the LDC for asking this, and thanks to the Board for coming up with a desired skill

set, The Board created a “skills matrix” that included the skills of the continuing Board and the needed/desired skills for the new members, THe LDC took that and found some great people to be on next year’s Board!

Open Discussions: One of the Board’s major roles, required by our governance, is to take the lead in visioning for our congregation. Too often, the needs of the day crowd out this kind of activity. Although I don;t think we did nearly enough of this, we at least improved ourselves by having not only the retreats mentioned above, but several blue-sky, open conversations about what we want for the future.

Thanks

Just a few parting words as I exit the Board after five years. I believe we’ve seen some real challenges, and some real improvements over these years. When I first joined the Board, my sense was that we were basically on a glide path that allowed us to follow the lead of our strong Executive and staff. This was reasonable – things were going well, no need to do otherwise. But this allowed the Board to lose its focus on leading and avoid fulfilling our intended role, per our governance. The pandemic and the transition, however, forced us to step more boldly into that space, and to actually lead.

I’m thankful to my fellow Board members on this journey, for all of whom I have great respect for working together to do the right thing, and for working patiently with their human, flawed president. I’ll be glad to have more free time after I leave, but I’ll miss the interactions I’ve had with these wonderful volunteer leaders. Great things are ahead for us.

Submitted by Clyde Hardin, President, Board of Trustees

Leadership Development Committee

The mission of the LDC, as outlined in the Bylaws, is: To develop and implement, in consultation with the Board, Executive, Staff, and Congregation, the means for identifying, cultivating, and developing leaders for the Congregation; To select candidates, in consultation with the Board and the Executive, for positions to be filled at the Congregation’s Annual Meeting.

This year, we had a talented and energetic team who creatively approached both tasks. Holly DeMuth, Connie Silver, Nancy Bragg, and Cecil Bennett brought their unique skills and insights to our work. Wendy Motch-Ellis provided invaluable knowledge and inspiration. Early in the year, we began work on an exciting new program, called Growing Through Serving, modeled on a successful program at a UU congregation in the Philadelphia area. GTS is designed to engage new and existing members in finding service opportunities that match their

interests and passions, and that fuel their spiritual growth. This work was started by the LDC and will move to the Care and Connect committee next year.

After a busy fall season with Reverend Audette's installation and associated activities, we started 2024 with our inaugural Leaders Connect workshop. This Sunday afternoon 3-hour workshop for current congregational leaders was held on January 21, with about 30 in attendance. We introduced the GTS program, introduced concrete ways to incorporate the 8 th principle, and brainstormed ideas for priorities for future trainings. Goals for the workshop were:

Meet and network with other leaders in the congregation Share highlights and challenges from your team's work, and what you need from the LDC, staff, or congregants. Reflect and think deeply about living the 8th principle as a leader Provide feedback to the LDC on how we can better support you as a leader - help us prioritize what specific training or information you need Participate in forming UU Asheville's vision for future leaders (new Growing through Serving program, additional leadership workshops, Long Range Planning vision)

Plans are to repeat a version of Leaders Connect annually, and to add a workshop for emerging leaders (Emerging Leaders Connect).

The spring was quite busy with identifying, recruiting, and interviewing candidates for the four Board positions that were coming open. This was especially challenging since the entire Executive Team of the Board was cycling off. Fortunately, we have four excellent candidates with the experience and skills to help the congregation move forward in this time of transition and growth.

The LDC made the recruitment process of nominated leaders to the board and LDC more defined and transparent, in alignment with the recommendation for the LDC from the Racial Justice Advisory Council 2022 Congregational Assessment Report which states: Clearly define and communicate criteria to the entire congregation for how the Board and LDC members are selected.
In an effort to better understand and recruit for the specific skills, experiences, and demographics needed on the board, the LDC asked the Board to identify those needs and create a Board skills grid. The LDC identified skills, experiences, and demographics needed on the LDC and created a similar grid. The LDC used the grid to contact known members with those skills, experiences, and varied demographics to ask if they would be willing to serve. Other potential candidates self-nominated or were nominated by someone else through open calls for over a month in the weekly e-news, as well as during a Sunday service. This process will be shared with the congregation at the June Annual Meeting as the candidates are introduced before the vote.

Two talented individuals – Venny Zachritz and Deanna Banks - will be joining the LDC as Toryand Holly cycle off.

Tory Schmitz
Chair, Leadership Development Committee

From the Lead Minister

The Blessings Report – Year One

As our first year together with me as your Lead Minister draws to a close, I hope we are all looking back with some awe and wonder at what we've accomplished together.

Growing Together

This year, we've seen many people "return" after covid and after the disruptions of ministerial transition. As rates of involvement began to tick up again, we had to pivot back to two services. We did this even though we did not have a budget for another service, and so we had to work creatively. The goal was to offer another worship service that both met real congregational needs, but also that added very little expense. The result was that we have created a 9:15 am Contemplative Service that, while almost always including the same sermon or homily as the "traditional" service at 11:15, offers a different worship experience, incorporating silence and a simpler format. It also is a shorter service, and only occasionally has live music, which is provided exclusively by unpaid volunteers, as the music budget cannot currently stretch to include paid music for two services. However, we are creatively using recorded video music, which allows us to bring in a very wide variety of performers and musical styles to support the worship. The Contemplative Service has been offered with childcare, which was a significant unbudgeted expense. However, after six months of experimenting, we have learned that our families are not using the childcare services, preferring to attend at 11:15 when we offer a full faith formation program for children and youth, and incorporate our children into worship fully.

Our practice of coffee hour at 10 am between services has gone fine, but is underused. We do find it very helpful to have the 10 am hour available for additional community conversations and light programming, and this time is also used for choir rehearsals as well as Newcomer Gatherings. As we have returned to monthly Newcomer Gatherings under Trevor Johnson, we've seen tremendous participation. His first event had 18 newcomers, and our most recent more than 20. We have also returned to holding in-person membership classes, led cooperatively by myself, Rev. Claudia, and Trevor. We intend to build a robust path to membership process, including both self-directed learning opportunities and our in-person guided membership work. We have a new online membership self-directed path that will be included as part of our website updates, hopefully completed this summer. It is intended for all congregants at every stage of their relationship as members here at UU Asheville, because faith formation is a lifelong process.

Study and Learn Together

A big part of my time this year has been spent trying to get to know members and friends as individuals, and in their roles in the congregation. To this end, I have offered Soup and Soul small dinner gatherings, weekly online Life, Abundant classes, and the four-week course American Autocracy. In partnership with our (newly renamed) Pride + Team, I coordinated with Gender Equality New York to offer Everything You Wanted to Know about Trans, Non-Binary, Intersex and Gender Expansive Folx, But Were Afraid to Ask. This excellent starting point remains available on-demand and the passcode is d*SzZ5EC. I also offered a special Pride Bingo "Learn Something New" session on gender and sexual identities, which was both fun and well-attended.

UU Avl as an Institution

Even with a late start, largely due to accommodating a new minister on a steep learning curve, the congregational leaders have accomplished big things this year. Our Leadership Development Team conducted workshops and is working on processes to help teams and committees have clear structure, practices that help develop and transition in new leaders, and attend to our practical work as matters of both faith and values - for example, by incorporating our 8th Principle commitments and our welcoming practices. This is a work in progress, but it has remained front burner. The Board has done strong work, helping to foster and support a Long Range planning team, looking at how we might foster youth leadership at the Board level, reviewing our ARIJAG commitments, identifying Board leadership strengths and needs, and working closely with the Annual Giving Drive. Both President Clyde Hardin and Board member Will Jernigan, who served excellently as AGD chair, wore multiple hats. And despite again a delayed start up of AGD development, the success of our current giving campaign is due to the hard work of members Will, Clyde, Ann McLellan (with big assists from her husband Jerry, and unofficial member of the team) and Wes Miller, and with the robust support of outgoing Director of Admin Wendy Motch-Ellis. Although we are predicting a significant deficit budget, the deficit amount
has been significantly reduced through their hard work, and through the generosity of all our members and friends.

One amendment we have made in that process is to make sure we are clear that participation and mutual support as a member of UU Asheville does mean offering financial support as possible, but that we also recognize and honor that in our challenging housing/healthcare/student loan/childcare expenses environment, personal budgets can be tight. We are working to make sure everyone knows that we value any contribution - be it $1, volunteering, or helping us with our expanding efforts at creating strong fundraisers like our annual auction. What helps most is communicating with us about how you are able to give each year. We're all in this together.

Staff Team

UU Asheville has a terrific staff team. Although there have been significant changes this year that deeply impact our depth of institutional/historical knowledge, your staff is incredible, and works hard out of love and care for this institution. I have been consistently impressed with how gracefully the team rises to challenges, adapts with compassion to changing circumstances, and is investing in building a strong and positive staff culture. We meet three times a month, two as staff "huddles" (shorter meetings) and once as a longer staff

meeting; we have had two development retreats, one with an outside facilitator, and also took a half-day to plan together for the coming year - a long-sought goal. Our staff time intentionally incorporates personal bonding/getting to know you work and check-ins, as well as practical work. Like with most institutions, our main challenges are keeping everyone informed with clear communications, and how to juggle more work than can be accomplished in any given day/week/year. With the support of congregational members and leaders, and our own staff team bon homie, we are making good progress.

Looking Ahead

Part of the work in this first year has, of course, been to reflect on the significant work the congregation has done over the last few years to articulate "whither from here?" and put that into a form that can guide us in the days to come. To that end, I have developed our "Asheville Tree of Life," and we have co-created a series of priority areas:

- Investment in being a Faith for the Future: we are building on our strong base of faith formation for our children and youth, especially, but also recognize our practice of Unitarian Universalism as one of the most promising faith traditions in a changing world. Our practices of incorporating world religious traditions in a non-creedal, historical faith, alongside our values-based community development in sexual health, personal identity, political and social engagement, and most of all, spiritual development, can change the world. We're starting with Asheville, and focusing on the family.
- Aiming for Collective Liberation. None of the challenges that restrict human flourishing happen in isolation; they are intersectional. Therefore, we know that none of us is free until all of us are free, and we keep this in front of us as people of faith. UU Asheville has determined to focus on several core elements of collective liberation: being an LGBTQIA+ Welcoming Congregation, embracing anti-racism and anti-oppression work as an 8th Principle Congregation, and spending two years focused on: voting rights, reproductive freedom, and climate justice. These areas of focus live alongside our ongoing participation in local efforts to alleviate hunger through our involvement in Be/Loved and other community partnership.

Alongside this, we now are in a phase where we are looking carefully at how our resources (time, talent, money, property) are serving our goals and the larger ministry we hope to do in Asheville. The Long Range Planning Team is guiding some excellent conversations to get insight from our members and friends, and we hope you will participate in at least one of those, and pay close attention as we move forward. Big decisions are on the horizon.

It is also important for me to note that we, together, are inheriting a budget that is currently beyond its actual means. We are doing all we can to grow our membership and financial base, through both giving but also: fundraising, rental income, and exploring grant possibilities, but the pace of change required to support the staff and program budget may be more demanding than we can manage to accommodate. If this is the case next year, your leadership teams and I are working to make everyone aware that some extremely difficult

decisions may need to be made as soon as next year. This is particularly disappointing given that the metrics we're seeing for health and growth with our current configuration are extremely positive; if we had a five year window at our current budget level, I believe we would be fine. But we have a two year window, instead - leaving us with only one church year to get to a balanced budget: 2024-25. That's why we need Everybody In.

Conclusions

From the excitement of our busy fall, with the Fall Mountain Retreat, our Auction, Start Up weekend with the Southern Regional Staff, the Installation, our concert series, through the pivot of two services in January, a season of robust and well-attended worship, workshops and leadership events, it has been a wonderful first year. The pace will be, by design and intent, a little more spacious in the coming months. Please plan now to help us with one of our three major fundraising efforts next year, take part in both small and large congregational activities, attend worship regularly, and help us work toward collective liberation. That's how we change the world.



Pastoral Care Team

The Pastoral Care Team (PCT) meets monthly with the lead minister, the Rev. Dr. Audette Fulbright Fulson. Our monthly meetings focus on issues of individual members and friends in the congregation we are supporting currently, and new concerns we have for individuals who might benefit from pastoral outreach. We also consider ways we might attend to the larger pastoral concerns of the community (e.g., through religious exploration, worship services).

Our regular duties include keeping in touch with those in need by telephone calls, notes, and visits. During the month, we check in with people we are supporting and report back to the minister with an update. The main requirements for being a member of the Pastoral Care Team are the abilities to listen without judgment and to keep confidential what is discussed.
In the fall of 2023, longtime team member Jill Preyer stepped into the role of PCT co-lead, joining Iris Hardin in coordinating the congregation's lay pastoral outreach. The PCT also formally recognized the MealTrain Coordinators and Good Grief Group (GGG) Facilitators as part of the pastoral care/outreach for our community. Occasionally, MealTrain and GGG leaders participate in meetings and/or trainings.

In November, the PCT led a regular Sunday worship service on the theme of Mental Health and Mental Illness. Joyce Hooley provided all music for the service. The PCT and members of the GGG also offered "When the Holidays Hurt" again in December – a quiet worship service created to acknowledge that the winter holiday season can be especially difficult for people who are not feeling merry and bright. Once again, Clyde Hardin supported the service by providing the music.

We are planning a team training for August 31, 2024. This training will be appropriate for current members of the team and people just joining the Pastoral Care Team. People interested in learning more about serving on the team should contact Iris Hardin, Jill Preyer, or send email to care@uuasheville.org.

Respectfully Submitted,
The 2023-2024 Pastoral Care Team:
Diane Bigelow
Tory Schmitz
Myrtle Staples
Glenn White
Iris Hardin and Jill Preyer, Co-Coordinators

From the Music Director

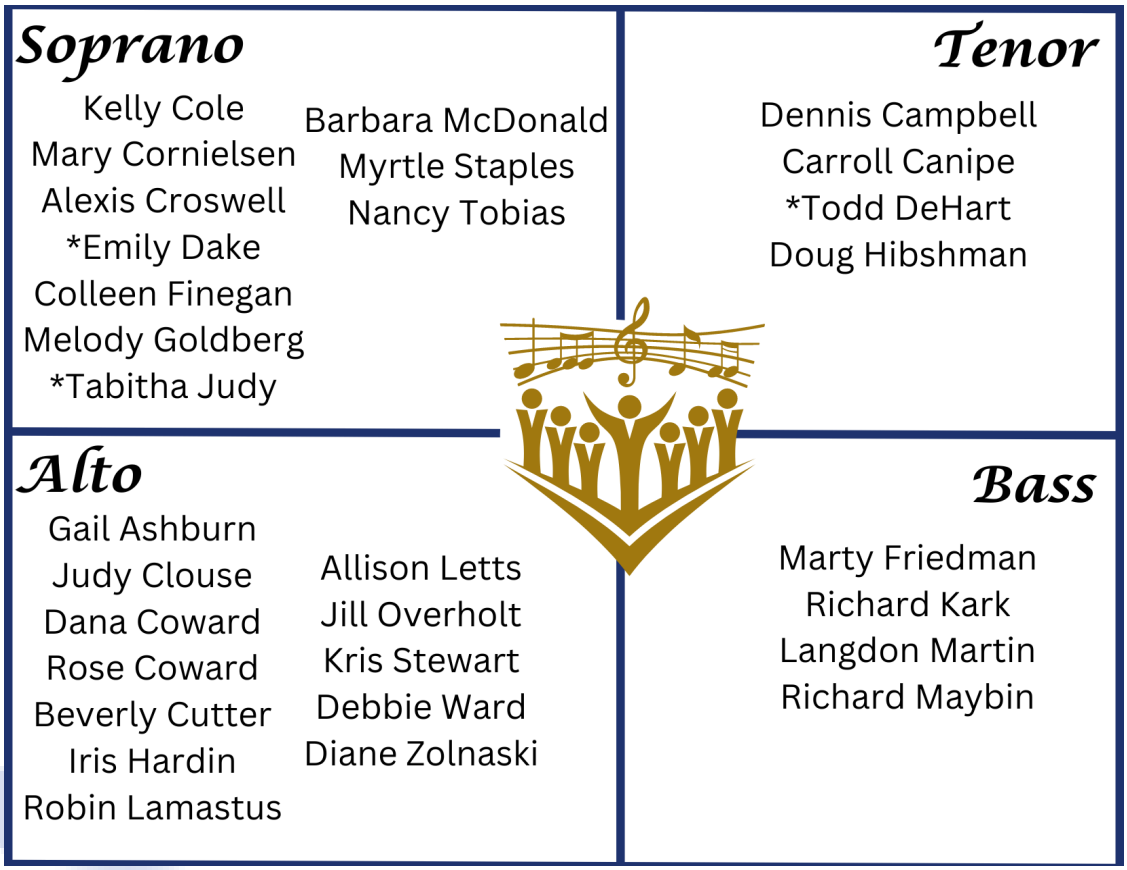
This past year has been a successful one for our music program. Our choir has gained several new members and we currently have 27 on our roster. We have continued to explore a variety of music and for the first time the choir sang a piece by a transgender composer, Michael Bussewitz-Quarm.

We have been fortunate to have music occasionally provided by our in-house musicians, Brett Johnson, Paul Moore, Will Jernigan, Sandra Goodson, Josef Butts and Marty Friedman (The Sandburgers), as well as Juliana Austin, Wes Miller and Steve Lapointe and Joyce Hooley-Gingrich. We also started a concert series, which featured artists Holly Near, Melanie DeMore and Peter Mayer. And as always, we have been very lucky to have guest artists from the Asheville area, including Womansong, Chris Rosser, Saro Lynch-Thomason, Andy Jurik, Sue Richards and Finn Magill.

Throughout the year I have worked closely with our ministers, Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson and Rev. Claudia Jiménez, our RE Staff, Kim Collins and Jen Johnson, and our AV Tech Crew, Simon Jacobs and Jess Fox. These collaborations have been rewarding and have helped to produce some meaningful services.

Below is a list of our 2023-24 choir members.

Dr. Les Downs, Music Director



Ringers (guest singers)

From the Minister of Faith Development

State of the Ministries: Faith Development & Justice
Rev. Claudia Jiménez, CRE
Minister of Faith Development

Ministry Overview

I am preparing this report after this year's Credo Sunday Services in which twelve youth shared their credo statements reflecting on what they believe and the values that currently inform their lives. It was the ultimate intergenerational faith development experience. Youth, advisors and mentors learned together, built trust, shared laughter and participated in activities that culminated in a Sunday service that deepened connections among the gathered community. Youth were held in love as they were vulnerable sharing their stories and perspectives with us. In a similar way, members of our small group ministries are held in love and care as they share their stories and perspectives in Soul Matters groups and other spiritual deepening groups. Despite the decline in participation in organized religion, UU Asheville has a thriving religious exploration program for children and youth, as well as a growing Adult Faith Exploration program. It has been a joy to work with our religious educators, and the various teams that offered engaging programs on the journey of meaning making and justice engagement this year. Their reports are included in the next few pages.

I continued to meet weekly with our Religious Educators Jen Johnson and Kim Collins to discuss programs and worship, celebrate successes and brainstorm how to handle challenges that arise. We also spent time learning about new safety procedures and expectations in order to be in compliance with insurance requirements. This year **Jen Johnson**, **Vea Quinn** and **Jennifer Oversmith** graciously leaned in to support RE when Kim Collins took much needed FMLA leave.

Beyond my work supporting the ministries of faith development and justice, I have also been intentional about supporting UU Asheville's engagement in the larger community. I worked with the People's Power Coalition to bring awareness about local issues, and partnered with local organizer Jen Hampton to offer a Sunday Service, "Labor in the Pulpit." I've also worked with our teams to explore interfaith connections. As a result, our congregation has co-sponsored justice events with interfaith partners and our UU the Vote team has participated as founding members of the Interfaith Voting Action Network (IVAN) in partnership with Carolina Jews for Justice, Congregation Beth Ha Tephila and Quaker Call NC.

Lastly, this year we welcomed with much joy and anticipation our new lead minister, Rev. Audette. It has been a year of learning, experimentation and growth as our staff team adapted to a new hands-on leadership style and welcomed innovations and a reframing of our mission and vision while facing changes in our staff team. As the end of the congregational year approaches, we are finding our rhythm as a reconstituted team (with one vacancy which we hope will soon be filled) and I look forward to our continued work together.

Faith Development: Children & Youth

Numbers

Total of children and youth registered for RE as of February: 110
Average Sunday morning children and youth attendance: 57
Average Sunday morning RE adult (volunteers) attendance: 21

Child Care - *Supervisor, Kim Collins*

We were blessed to have **Via Quinn** join our child care staff towards the end of the 2022-23 church year. We were able to hire another staff in the fall, **Phoebe Schropp**. Via and Phoebe were both raised as UU's and have been a tremendous asset! For the first time since before the pandemic, we had two solid, reliable child care providers. They both go above and beyond every week and are beloved by our children and families. Via was able to attend the congregational retreat at The Mountain to help with child care and it was a terrific experience. Via also stepped up when Kim was on FMLA leave in October and November, helping to keep things running smoothly in child care and K-8 RE. Via and Phoebe also took on cleaning out RE1, which had become a storage space and converting back into a nursery space as originally intended. Since RE1 is connected to the child care room, RE2, and has a large opening between the two rooms, it increases our options on Sunday mornings depending on the ages of the kids in child care. It also offers a safe, more private area for parents to change diapers, nurse babies, and just have a quiet place when needed. Via and Phoebe have also taken the initiative to make it easier to track ratios on Sunday mornings and make sure that we are compliant with our safety policy and state law. They have taken the time to educate parents about how the ratios work and how we sometimes need parents to stay in order to keep acceptable ratios. We still really lack consistent volunteers in child care. Having more consistent volunteers to supplement our paid child care staff would be a great way for the congregation to show support for our many young families.

K-8 RE – *Kim Collins*


Our youngest UUs baking cinnamon rolls for coffee hour with Jill Huebner.

Due to losing access to the classroom spaces in 21 Edwin, we needed every space in and around RE Commons to accommodate our robust program! We have opened up RE7 (formerly office space and also used as nursery space) as a classroom, and were also able to recruit enough volunteers for our desired breakout of grades. Our K-1st, 2nd-3rd, and 4th-5th groups all used Soul Matters theme packets for curriculum this year. The packets give our leaders many different options to explore the monthly theme through story, play, art, and reflection. Our K-1st and 2nd-3rd groups occasionally combined due to availability of volunteers, which worked out great!

Our K-1 team was **Jen Oversmith** (who also shared some Spirit Play with our kiddos), **David Gavlinksi, TK Browning, Nancy Perna**, and **Joyce Hooley-Gingrich**, along with her husband Bob and their instruments, joined our kiddos once a month to share joyful music! Our 2nd-3rd grade team was all first time RE volunteers and they were terrific: **Victoria Hoyland, Joanna Hewlett, Shepard O'Connell,** and **Jasmine Friedman**, along with several parents who stepped in to assist over the year.
Our 4th-5th team had a small but mighty group and was happy to utilize our outdoor spaces for exploring and learning together. The teaching team was all RE veterans: **Lach Franquemont, Ryan Williams,** and **Amy Glenn** were all leaders, assisted regularly by **Anna Martin** with **Kasey Dyer Hester** proving back up here and with other groups as a sub.
Our 6th-8th grade group used UUA curriculum: Heeding the Call: Exploring the Qualities of a Justice Maker." While the subject matter was great, it wasn't as successful as we had hoped. We plan to return to using a world religions curriculum, Crossing Paths, for this group next year. Our terrific teaching team did a great job with a heavy lift though - thanks to **Nancy Bragg** for taking on a leadership role with the rest of the team: **Gini Jones, Ruth Christie, Holly Demuth,** with **Stephen Cefalu and Leila Giesenschlag.** We also offered an RE leader RE-Fresh in January, inviting all RE folks to a short session where we talked about different learning styles, making sure that we are prioritizing community and relationship building over rigidly sticking to the curriculum, and welcomed **Lissadell Greene** to share some tips and strategies for working with neurodiverse populations. We strive to offer a Religious Exploration program that is welcoming to everyone, meaning that we have to be more flexible and provide opportunities for movement and other ways of expression - music, art, creative play etc.

Our Whole Lives (OWL) – Kim Collins, OWL Coordinator
We had a great 7th-8th OWL class this year, facilitated by trained volunteers **Sarah Kirkpatrick, Steve Lapointe, Dan Phairas,** and **Cait Carroll**. Kim also helped to facilitate when needed. We had hoped to be able to offer the newly updated K-st grade curriculum this year, but a lack of facilitators and a very busy year made it difficult to get it off the ground. We are planning to offer it in fall 2024. Having our dedicated OWL classroom in RE3 has been really helpful, the kids are comfy and the teachers are able to leave up OWL materials and frequently used resources which makes it an easier lift. Since we have begun offering two services again this year, we plan to shift OWL classes to coffee hour in 2024-25. This will allow more folks to participate in OWL while also being able to attend worship and regular RE classes.

Family Ministry – Kim Collins / All Ages Worship – Kim Collins, Jen Johnson
We had a robust year of All Ages Worship, services were offered by Rev. Audette, Rev. Claudia, and Religious Educator, Kim Collins. Religious Educator, Jen Johnson was the lead on both the YRUU service in February, and the amazing double credo services from the Coming of Age group is May. In total, we had 9 All Ages Worship services this year, with one more planned for June. We welcomed a lot of new families this year and we are hearing that they are coming through our doors because they are looking for a community that their whole family can be a part of. They have told us that our welcoming, family friendly Wee Worship area in the Sanctuary shows that we are actually welcoming to children and families. We did fewer Family Ministry

activities outside of Sundays this year, which was okay! Kim did plan a few things at other times, like family yoga and a family fun game night, but attendance was low which tells us that families just may not have the bandwidth to participate in something else during the week. We have continued to support families with pastoral care. Being there for families in times of distress, sadness, and instability helps us develop as a community and builds strong foundations for lasting relationships.

Coming of Age (CoA) – *Jen Johnson*


This year's CoA youth and their mentors before the Credo Sunday Service.

This program keeps us hopping all year long with joy and dedication. Beginning the spring prior with volunteer recruitment (this year, 19 in the CoA program alone!) and rising CoA family info session to the summer planning, meetups and multiple orientations; Fall liftoff with opening ceremony; Sunday sessions; 3 retreats; mentor/ee meetups; credo work; May CoA worship service; and finally the closing ceremony to honor and celebrate the hearty work of everyone - youth and adult…it is truly a full and special year of religious exploration and deep work for our younger teens and their guiding light(houses).

After last year's (re)visioning of Coming of Age and Jen's professional development work around youth ministry, one implemented change was utilizing a new curriculum: *Becoming* from Soul Matters. This worked well, continuing with themes of inner and spiritual reflection like in past years but in a more inclusive and interactive way and with more sessions and material promoting UU values of the 8th principle, justice, and liberation. Some topics the group confronted included: *the culture of privilege; the ethical life; their future selves; god/spirit/the divine; teenage cliques and stereotypes; committing to needs greater than their own;* and *navigating the power to help others break out of their boxes* (allyship), and more. This weekly class time offered a structured lesson and journal time to further their thought and heartwork around personal and collective identity. From a facilitator after one session:

> *"There was thoughtful and intimate conversation around understanding what privilege is and what invisible advantages we are born into. To have a visual representation of our areas of privilege, everyone made a bracelet with beads symbolizing areas of advantage and ways those specific*

advantages show up in our daily lives. We ended our time together considering how we can leverage our privilege to support others and live the UU principles."
8th principle and many Article II values represented in this lesson.

Retreats for community building, fun, intentional activities to support their spirituality and credo formation, deep thinking, sharing, and the longer time and space together (some away from campus) all supported their faith development in a different way than 60-90 minutes together on Sundays. Some of the activities included: team building games and challenges, UU trivia, soul collage, scavenger hunt, credo madlibs, solo "wilderness" time, special rituals and traditions with mentors, and more. At the Fall retreat this year, the CoA group also joined the Blue Ridge Pride Fest Procession with other UU folx. Retreats are often mentioned as highlights and memorable parts of the year for the youth and adults alike year to year. One youth recently shared in worship following the spring retreat that it was nice to be away from their devices (phones) at the overnight campout! That is a testament to the power of these experiences. :)


CoA youth and advisors focused on an artistic project

Mentors are a very special part of this program, and we were fortunate to recruit 14 awesome adults to connect with and help guide the youth on their CoA journey.

Hopefully you gleaned some of the multigenerational relationship building that happens through CoA at the credo worship services (if not, check out the mentor introductions in the service…links in below paragraph). Monthly M&M (mentor & mentee) meetups and class time together proved to be a great connecting point for pairs and the cohort as a whole. The pre-class time was heartwarming with small groups getting creative w/ art projects, playing games, baking, conversing, and bonding throughout 23 Edwin; it was usually a lively and full house on those mornings! The challenge those days was space. Up to 28 people crowded in 23 Edwin Parlor (spilling out into other rooms and offices during breakouts and pair work) during their 90ish minutes of class together was challenging. Although alternative spaces were considered, this seemed to be the best workable option on campus.

Creating a credo project is an important part of the UU CoA journey. We ask youth to craft something to represent their beliefs, their "North Star," what they set their hearts to, and/or how UU is a part of their lives. Often this means writing a reflection or essay but can be an original piece of art, music, or other means of expressing their credo. Building blocks for creating that are positioned throughout the year, as are opportunities to get comfortable sharing it with the congregation. The culmination for most youth is presenting that at the Credo worship service in May. You can find those recordings (each service is different): 9:15 HERE and 11:15 HERE.

Because of this program's unique elements and the summer youth trip, we typically see strong connections formed (between youth peers, youth/adult and adult/adult!), personal growth in this critical time of development, and a stronger claim on their UU identity.

Connecting CoA and YRUU youth has been a goal for the past couple of years. We invite YRUUers to join the CoA cohort at various events, often in ways that let the older teens show and grow their leadership. For example, at the winter retreat, we were excited to hear some older YRUU youth reflect back on their CoA experience as challenging, doable, and rewarding with the current Coming of Agers. The two groups will travel together on the youth trip this summer. Another highlight was having one of our "homegrown" UU Asheville young adults in her twenties connect with the group around her CoA experience and how growing up UU continues to shape her life.

For the first time ever, we offered a CoA parent group to better support the family's evolving relationships and roles in this transitional time of youth development. Facilitated by Iris Hardin, the group met 5-6 times. Reportedly a good first-time offering.

Facilitators: **Mike Horak, Tom House, Brett Johnson, Kelly Wedell.**
Mentors: **Emily Brier, Nancy Clarke, Allen Currens, Lisa Forehand, Jim Gamble, Lisa Horak, Sharon LeDuc, Kimberly Mason, Joy McConnell, Emily Pegram, Nancy Perna, Connie Silver, Will Smith, MaryAnn Somervill.**
Parent group facilitator: **Iris Hardin**
Staff: Jen Johnson

<u>YRUU</u> – Jen Johnson



Youth and advisors before the YRUU- Young Unitarian Religious Universalists Sunday service

Bigger efforts tended to draw more youth together this year. (That may be because of the involved, busy teen and family life many of them live. We are glad to be in community with and serve them!) Some highlights from YRUU:

YRUU led worship service in February! They crafted a fun service based on Dr. Suess' Sneetches story. In case you missed it, check out the recording here.

Late Night at UU! Fun, dinner, connection w/ each other and Rev. Audette, brainstorming and initiating plans for the YRUU worship service, games, conversation, laughter. This special weekend evening

together provided all of that plus a chunk of time to create the foundation and flow of ideas for the upcoming youth-led worship service. Sundays and these planned bonus events build cohesion and foster a stronger tie to their faith home.

Served UU and the wider community! Hosted a holiday gift drive for teens living at Eliada Homes, car wash (UU auction item), care packages for our young adult YRUU alum, volunteered at the blood drive, helped CoA with trip fundraisers. Additionally, 2 of our youth offered testimonials during the Annual Giving Drive; listen to Bella's HERE.

About the care packages: an annual tradition (now in year 4), this feel good project keeps our connection to our "homegrown" young adults. YRUU youth packaged up some special items and UU goodness to share with 13 of our recent-ish youth alum. Items include homemade treats, self care items, spiritual and mindfulness support, stress relievers, and handwritten notes to each of the young adults. We often hear back from the recipients or their parents. Just a few of the comments we received this year:

- *So needed.*
- *(My kiddo) hasn't attended a service in over a year so I'm excited for her to remember that the UUs love her :)*
- *(S) texted me the other day to see if she could go to church with me. I wasn't sure what prompted her but of course I happily said yes! Later I realized that Sophie must have gotten her UU treats in the mail. :) I'm glad it made her want to go to a service soon. Thanks for taking the time to facilitate the sending of the care packages! It sure means a lot to them!!*
- *I have to tell you that E and F went to the Raleigh UU church together after E received her care package!*

We plant seeds, often not knowing fully how or when they'll bloom. It is great to hear some of the positive (and in this case, fairly immediate) impact of what our community is doing for our young adults (and with our youth).

Youth CON in December at the Mountain. That continues to be a special place for many of our teens.

Explored congregational (Soul Matters) themes.

Big thanks to **Langdon Martin, Margaret McAlister, Joanne Fox, and Chris Sobin** for supporting and cheering this group of high schoolers. Adult influences outside of parents are especially significant in the teen years, so these trusted and consistent relationships can have greater impact than we even realize - for the individuals and societally. Our UU adults are doing that -- we should all thank them!

YOUTH TRIP – Jen Johnson

We're excited to have 14-16 youth and 3-4 adult advisors traveling to CERSI (Central East Region Summer Institute…it's a UU thing!) together in July. For the first time, we'll have BOTH Coming of Age and YRUU youth traveling together.

Making the youth trip a reality requires strong parent and youth involvement in fundraising and trip planning. It's a lot of work(!) and benefits the families (paying less) AND the congregation as a whole, bringing them together at several events throughout the year. We appreciate this loving community where we care for, inspire, support, and share the work with each other.

Fundraising:
Families again coordinated events to serve the congregation and raise money for the youth trip (not supported in the operating budget). Souper Sundays provide soulful nourishment in many ways (social, physical, multigenerational connection, to name a few). The annual "Big Event" dinner and entertainment is always a fun tradition and another great multigenerational fellowship opportunity. A note that the families typically fund and provide these events out of their own pockets, e.g., buying and making all of the food and beverages themselves. Teens also served at a few UU events: the auction, various receptions, and donuts one Sunday.

Youth CONs
Getting all pieces coordinated and communicated in preparation for Fall Conferences at The Mountain. Stalwart volunteer parent **Anna Martin** does amazing work to publicize and inform, track UU Asheville registrants, recruit chaperones and drivers, host a pre-CON meeting for participant/families each time, and work with staff to assure safety measures, background checks, and forms are in place before they go. She also solicits feedback afterward to make it an even more positive experience for all participants, children and adults, in the future. Anna's thorough and detailed work relieves a lot of time and energy from staff and is much appreciated!

Most of our CoA youth and several YRUUers went to The Mountain Youth CONference together in December. This was a beloved, long-time custom for some of our teens and some were introduced to these special weekends for the first time this year. The senior high CON had 15 UU Asheville youth (9 CoA, 6 YRUU) and 4 adult chaperones.

We sent a group of elementary kiddos and middle schoolers to the Fall CON too!
Anecdata from one middle school CON advisor: "The kids who were in my van are getting together this coming weekend outside of church - connections were definitely formed…"

Because last year's annual report was published before our summer together, here is a recap of youth summer meetups in 2023:

- Picnic and pool party for our current and rising high schoolers. New connections made (including a brand new youth to us), a lot of laughter, chatting, and older youth "wisdom" shared with younger youth entering Coming of Age. The teens pointed out that they are all from different schools and that it

was good to have these friendships outside of school. Also, a youth shared how much an advisor has meant to him and that the advisor was an amazing human being.

- A few special events just for the rising CoA group - games, s'mores, and more.
- YRUU escape room.
- YRUU Sunday hangouts.
- Raft trip for CoA and YRUU. From an adult leader: *I think the trip was a huge success!! It was great to watch the kids getting to know each other. Several CoA youth bonded (including some who are very timid and/or new to our congregation in the past year). Two of them who seemed to be relating well were asked when they first met each other. The answer: "Today." Another youth (who has severe mental health challenges) got a big cheer from the group when jumping off a rock pretty high up after hesitating several times. Big confidence boost noticed in one of the youth. Welcomed brand new youth to our UU Asheville community and YRUU.*

These special events require a big amount of coordination and communication, especially in the summer months (when people are traveling, youth working, etc.); families aren't as consistent in Sunday attendance; permission forms and transportation required; and a smaller volunteer base to draw from (relying more on parents to execute these outings and non-Sunday morning happenings). We have offered more for our middle and high schoolers the past two summers, with varying degrees of success. It likely helps with retention and cohesiveness entering the new year…but can we swing the staff time?

Other RE highlights:


Multi-age play day in RE!

Installation- Audette's handmade gift from children (thank you Via and Jennifer for enacting that!), Children/family blessing (Eliza and Lucille), Wisdom story (Jen and Will), CoA youth reception volunteers…yay!

A last minute pivot on Thanksgiving weekend provided ample fun and bonding across the young ages. It was a beautiful and relatively peaceful morning of games and art, in mostly age specific groups first, then some multi-age play. We served 22 kindergarten-high schoolers + more children in childcare/PreK.

Professional Development

Jen - Practice the Practice: Experiential Learning (Renaissance Module), January-May 2024. Jen's Youth Ministry practicum project was the re-visioning work being done for our Coming of Age program.

Kim attended GA, June 2023 and was particularly inspired by the Disrupt Church workshop that explored different ways for churches to live out their values in their support of local communities. One of the ways we opened our doors this year was to welcome a group of college students from New York doing an "alternative spring break" working on building a house in our community with Habitat for Humanity. We offered them a place to stay in 23 Edwin while they were in town for a week and it worked out well! Kim was their main contact in planning and while in town.
Kim - Systems Theory (Renaissance Module) September-October 2023

Faith Development: Adults

Team: **Abby Holmes, Wilma Oman,Cathy Gabe, Bernise Lynch**, Kim Collins (Family Ministry liaison), Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

The Adult Faith Development team met monthly to plan programs providing spiritual deepening for the congregation. A special thank you to **Jim Steffe, Kelly Wedell and Sherry Lindquist** whose terms ended this year.

I am also the staff liaison for Small Group Ministry, the Buddhist Sangha, the Covenant of UU Pagans and The Mountain Gathering (their reports are included below).

A few highlights from this year:
Taoism 101 Series offered by **Professor Marc Mullinax** (onsite)
Sacred Text Series offered by **Amy Glenn** (online)
Mental Health Basics offered by **Jill Preyer** (onsite)
Ethical Eating Series sponsored by Avl UU Animal Ministry and facilitated by **Bob and Rebecca Bringle**

Beyond working with the Adult FD Team I also continued crafting Sunday Worship once a month, often in collaboration with congregants and teams. I also offered 1st Wednesday Vespers every other month Sept.-May. A few worship theme highlights:
Transformation & Repair
Disrupting Church and Other Wonderings
Kindling a Playful Flame: A Malibs Service


One of our younger UU youth sharing an original poem during this year's Christmas Eve service.

Provided support planning the Coming of Age worship service

TEAM REPORTS:

Small Group Ministry
LeadershipTeam: **Ann Perry**, Venny Zachritz (membership liaison), Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)
Facilitator Team:
Conversation Groups: **Kathy Holmes, Gini Jones, James Gamble, Janet DeGruttola, Kelly McEnany**, Rev. Claudia Jiménez
Creativity Matters: **EJ Haack, James Cassara**
UU Writers: **Kelly Riedsel, Christine Van Wandelen**

This year we supported 9 groups, one of which met via Zoom. They met Sept.-June. Groups disband during the summer and new groups are formed for the new congregational year. There were a total of 76 participants (excluding facilitators) this year. Facilitators were trained in the summer. There were three facilitator meet-ups to support facilitators throughout the congregational year.
Leadership team member Venny Zachritz retired as Membership Coordinator leaving a vacuum in the program. Venny was responsible for sending out group e-mails, promoting the program, collecting data about potential participants and facilitators, planning & co-facilitating the training and forming & communicating with the new groups. Rev. Claudia will explore with Rev. Audette how new staff member Trevor Johnson might support Soul Matters Groups in the new congregational year.

There is also one Legacy Covenant group led by Nancy Bragg that does not disband every year like Soul Matters Groups. We ask that new members attend a Soul Matters Group before they join the Legacy Covenant Group.

UUA Buddhist Sangha
Co-chairs: **Stef Garvin and Duane Bigelow**

The UUAC Buddhist Sangha continues to meet in person in the church sanctuary the second and fourth Tuesday of each month (with the exception of major holidays). The purpose of the UUCA Buddhist Sangha is to support the community in their interest in and practice of Buddhist teachings..

Sangha participants continue to comprise a mix of church members as well as non- members who are interested in Buddhism as a religious and / or philosophical practice, and who seek to cultivate mindfulness and meditation as methods for promoting peace of mind and gaining personal insight. Meeting format:
Check- in
Group meditation
Presentation on a topic related to Buddhist teaching or the Dharma

Discussion

Topics this past year included "the eightfold path", varieties of meditation, make your own mandala , as well as audio and video recordings of Buddhist perspectives as presented by Tara Brach and Thich Nhat Hanh . Some of our participants attend on a regular basis and others attend more sporadically or simply have come to check us out but decide not to return. We now have a mailing list of over 25 individuals. A special thank you to Christine Rich who left the team and was a co-chair and co-founder of the Sangha.
Submitted by Duane Bigelow

Covenant of UU Pagans (CUUPS)
Steering Committee Blue Ridge Spirit CUUPS: **Sherry Lundquist, Susan Foster, Nanette Manhart, Phoebe Winter and Randy Sullivan**

This year has been interesting and fun for Blue Ridge Spirit CUUPS. We held our 8 yearly rituals celebrating the turning of the wheel, both in our beautiful sanctuary space and outdoors at Grove park. Our gatherings have been well attended by congregation members and the general public, with an average of 15 to 20 participants at many holidays. We have followed our rituals with a potluck which has helped to bring our community together.

As part of our past service to our community, we have supported donating books for prison ministry. We would like to offer our drum circles and labyrinth walks as a way to give back to the community and invite the community to participate with us.

We are grateful to UU Asheville for their support and cooperation as we move forward with new and exciting plans for celebrating the earth based holidays and being a part of the UU worship services. We welcome all to our circle.
Submitted by Susan Foster and Sherry Lundquist

The Mountain – Annual Congregational Gathering


All ages pumpkin carving at The Mountain.

Planning Committee: Co-Chairs **Anna Martin & Sandra Goodson**
2023 Planning Team: **Adam Griffith, Joanne Fox, Connie Silver, Will Jernigan, Monica Youngman,** Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

About 107 folks gathered at the Mountain in October of 2023 to enjoy a weekend of workshops, good food, lovely weather and social interaction. A highlight of the weekend was having a social hour in the Great Room of the Lodge, to enjoy the gorgeous

view. Other highlights included pumpkin carving led by The Ransoms, viewing the partial eclipse, soul collage, and the talent show. Attendees adjusted to the planning committee's decision for only non alcoholic drinks to be served at social hour, and everyone enjoyed mocktails on Saturday afternoon. We had hiking, scary stories, dance, energetic morning circle, thoughtful sharing in reflective workshops, and more! The Sandburgers delighted us with their music and Paul Moore, as always, gave us some wonderful piano music for showtunes. Revs Claudia and Audette gave us some wonderful inspiration during opening and closing worship.
Submitted by Anna Martin

Justice Ministry

Council members: **Anita Feldman/James Gamble** (Economic Justice/BeLoved)**, Bernise Lynch/ Colleen Fingan** (Pride+), **Ed Prestemon/ Kate Jerome & Venny Zachritz** (Environmental Action Team)**, Fredda Mangel/ Jensen Gelfond** (Anti-Racism Immigration Justice Action Group)**, Iris Williams** (Avl UU Animal Minsitry)**, Joanne Fox** (UU the Vote)**, Linda Kooiker** (Community Plate)**, Wilma Oman** (Spiritual grounding; Reproductive Justice), Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

All council member reports are included below. The Justice Films series is funded by the congregation and organized by member Charlie Wussow. Although Charlie is not a member of the council, he is receptive to requests and suggestions from council members regarding themes and/or film titles. His report is also included.

Justice Priorities
This year Rev. Audette organized a vote to prioritize our justice commitments for the congregation and the two ministers. The top three areas selected by the congregation were: Voting Rights, Reproductive Justice and Climate Justice. These are complemented by an underlying commitment to being a Green Sanctuary and Welcoming Congregation that is working toward collective liberation.

Community Engagement
I serve on boards and committees that support the justice priorities of our congregation. As a member of the steering committee for the Creation Care Alliance, a local ecumenical environmental justice organization, I was part of the planning team for the February 2024 Sacred Symbiosis Symposium attended by a few of our members as well as this year's interfaith Earth Day Vigil.

I continue to serve on the board of NC UU Justice Ministry keeping UU Asheville connected with UUA justice efforts such as UU the Vote. I also participate in the monthly Faith4Justice praxis meetings and support the local Racial Equity Institute(REI) team as a caucus facilitator. I am on the team organizing this year's REI year's first onsite, in person training post COVID.

Reproductive Justice

As a result of the vote a new ministry has emerged at UU Asheville: Reproductive Justice Ministry. The group was formed after participating in the UUA Curriculum "Reproductive Justice: Expanding Our Social Justice Calling." The facilitator team was **Jane Bramham, Kelly Wedell, Wilma Oman** and myself. After the series, the group continued to meet to explore how to support education and action for Reproductive Justice. The congregational vote solidified their commitment. The group meets monthly and is open to community members who are leaning into Reproductive Justice advocacy. Below are a few highlights from their work together this year:.

The Asheville Clothing swap organized by member Lexi Croswell was a very successful fundraiser raising several thousand dollars for Planned Parenthood. Numerous members also volunteered to set up and support the event.

The Planned Parenthood fundraiser *Standing Strong Asheville* was co-sponsored by UUAVL. Numerous UUs attended. Lexi Croswell was honored for her outstanding work with fundraising (clothing swaps) for Planned Parenthood.

Good trouble WNC had a meetup event with focus on reproductive rights at UUAVL that was co-sponsored by the Reproductive Justice Team.

The documentary Plan C was shown. It was co-sponsored with Congregation Beth HaTephila. A discussion of the film and presentation from a Planned Parenthood physician followed. The Reproductive Justice Team looks forward to future collaboration with Congregation Beth HaTephila.
Given the concerns for security at events supporting Reproductive Justice and abortion healthcare access we paid for security at the WNC Good Trouble event and the Plan C screening. Expenses were offset by good will donations from participants. There were no incidents to report at either event.

Several members of the team are being trained through Planned parenthood South Atlantic Region to do deep canvassing as part of reproductive justice work relevant in the upcoming election.

Team member Kelly Wedell attended the conference "Becoming a SACReD Congregation: Spiritual Alliance of Communities for Reproductive Dignity." The team looks forward to hearing from Kelly and applying what shares as we plan future events.

Collective Liberation

On January 28 board members Mary Alm and Adam Griffith, both ministers and representatives from the Justice MInsitry Council Jensen Gelfond, Bernise Lynch and Joanne Foxmet to follow up on the Racial Justice Advisory Council Recommendations. I presented an overview of which recommendations were implemented, on-going and pending. We discussed the importance of on-going work on leadership development through the

lens of radical welcome and collective liberation. We reviewed the use of the term collective liberation to remind us that our freedom is intertwined with everyone else's. The challenges identified were:
1. How do we keep the congregation informed and involved in moving toward collective liberation?
2. What would an equity audit entail for our congregational system and its processes? When would it happen? Who would implement it?
3. What training and onboarding procedures for new members, existing members and team members would support moving toward collective liberation? Who would be responsible for creating these procedures and corresponding trainings?
4. What is the best way to ensure accountability?
It was the hope of the gathered group that an Equity Accountability and Transparency Report would be provided by our lead minister for the 2024 annual meeting with contributions from the board, the Justice Ministry Council, religious exploration and other teams working on RJAC recommendations.

TEAM REPORTS

Economic Justice

Team: **Anita Feldman, James Gamble, Margaret McAlister, Jensen Gelfond**

Economic Justice has seen an expansion to include Saturday Sanctuary beyond the three projects UUCA is doing with BeLoved (auction, village, pantry; all reports below)

Saturday Sanctuary

UUCA volunteered at Saturday Sanctuary for the first time, during winter 2023-2024. Saturday Sanctuary is organized and hosted by First Presbyterian Church in downtown Asheville. They provide lunch and a warm space every Saturday in winter from 11am-2pm in their Fellowship Hall, serving 100+ people. Some UUCA volunteers attended an initial volunteer orientation session at the beginning of the winter, while others joined in later (interested people could simply show up at any Saturday Sanctuary to begin their volunteer journey). Five UUCA people signed up for the initial training, and others joined in afterwards. We had approximately 10 total UUCA folks involved in Saturday Sanctuary this year. It was heartwarming to be in community and provide resources for those who need it most. Volunteers had opportunities to prepare the meal, clean up, serve the meal in a food line, and hang out in the Fellowship Hall and eat lunch together. There was an off-duty police officer present, hired by the church, for security. The format of the food line (people getting into a line to receive food from volunteers) along with the presence of an officer armed with lethal force felt like barriers to genuine connection with the community (12 Baskets uses a less restrictive model), but overall it felt very beneficial to be in a place where a congregation opened up their space and provided resources to those who need them, especially during the cold months. First Presbyterian has been doing this in one form or another for about 15 years, and their leadership such as Jamie Brady and Ami Greene could provide valuable insight should UUCA decide to embark on a similar path in the future.
Submitted by Jensen Gelfond. jgelfond@me.com

BeLoved Asheville Raise Another Home Auction
The 3rd annual auction benefiting BeLoved Asheville will be June 15th; I hope you can join us! Here is the link to buy tickets:
https://auctria.events/belovedrahauction24

Our 2nd annual Raise Another Home Auction benefiting the building of the BeLoved Village by BeLoved Asheville was held in May of 2023 and we raised 20% more than our 1st auction- over $150,000! **Nancy Gamble** and I proudly and gratefully represented UU Asheville on this auction's planning committee along with 7 other women in the Asheville community; together we represent five faith organizations: St. Matthias Episcopal Church, The Cathedral of All Souls, Land of the Sky United Church of Christ, Congregation Beth Israel, & the UU Congregation.

We are so appreciative of the support from our UU Asheville community, in terms of sponsorships, donations, & volunteers! A special & heartfelt shoutout to Bill & Deb Holden for their incredibly generous donation of $25,000. It is rich and rewarding work. Please contact me if you would like to join our efforts!
Submitted by Margaret McAlister margmac55@yahoo.com

BeLoved Village
Construction at BeLoved Village advanced significantly in 2023 with the completion of framing for all 11 small homes (in addition to the existing model, making a total of 12 homes). Volunteers from UUCAvl and many others in the community (including professional builders who volunteered their teams) worked at a wide range of tasks at the village, usually once or twice per week throughout the year. This work included building and setting frames for concrete footers, connecting floor joists, laying down subfloors, framing walls, and anchoring roof rafters, among various other construction tasks. Volunteer work also included site cleanup and organizing to help crews be more efficient and to keep the developing village looking presentable for visitors and inspectors.

As of this report, all 11 newly constructed homes are roofed and sided, and crews have added front porches creating a true community feel. Plumbing and electrical are “roughed in” at all the houses, windows have been installed (with a few exceptions due to supply issues), and foam insulation is blown in at about half the homes. All this work now makes the homes ready for interior finishing (sheetrock, plumbing and electrical fixtures, flooring, etc.) which will be ongoing throughout the remainder of year. As the homes near completion, landscaping work will begin as well.

With the conclusion of heavy construction at the Village, additional volunteer opportunities will be opening up for UUCAvl adults and youth. These opportunities may include painting, furniture assembly, interior decorating, and landscaping, among others.

Upon completion, BeLoved Village will provide 12 comfortable homes for people in our community who otherwise would not be able to afford comparable housing in Asheville, where rental rates are the highest in the state. The homes at BeLoved Village will be priced so people earning approximately 30% of area median income will be able to afford to live there. And not only will residents of BeLoved Village be able to afford the rent, but they will also build equity in the property thanks to BeLoved Asheville's innovative financial model, further strengthening the community.
Submitted by James Gamble jamesgamble89@gmail.com

BeLoved/UU Charlotte Street Pantry

UUCA is into our third year of supplying food, toiletries, and seasonal items to the Charlotte Street Pantry. A dedicated group of 17 Sustainers and 35 Adopters are keeping the pantry supplied every day. The Sustainers have made a commitment to donate supplies at least once a month, and the Adopters get the supplies at UU and fill the pantry on their chosen day of the month. Jim and I visit the cabinets once a week to reorganize and fill the cabinets. We also email the entire group on our Google Group to inform everyone what is most needed. This method has been working well. This year I added a labeled bin in Sandburg Hall to encourage everyone in the congregation to give whenever they are able. This has added needed donations and more participation.

We had one special event on Christmas for the second year – a gift wrapping party. We wrapped the beautiful hats and scarves made and donated by the Fiber Friends, headed by **Mara Sprain**. It was a spirited and fun multi-aged group of wrappers. Those presents were then brought to the pantry by the Adopters during the week between Christmas and New Year's.

Our remaining plan for this fiscal year is to update our pantry, either by getting a new one, or by painting and repairing it, hopefully involving the youth. In addition, we have chosen a metal cabinet to buy in case either of our current plastic cabinets get broken beyond repair.
Submitted by Anita Feldman anitasfeldman@gmail.com

Pride+ Team
Co-chairs: Bernise Lynch, Emily Brier, Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson

Pride+ Team (previously known as URU) experienced many changes this year: our name (now indicative of a clear focus identifiable to all), changes in leadership settling on a joint minister/congregant mix which provides better coverage and a new lead minister who has revived energy and congregational participation.

We began work on our Welcoming Congregation renewal. Initial investigation indicates we are meeting most of the requirements. This work continues.

UUAsheville showed up big for The Blue Ridge Pride Celebration in September. Our multigenerational participation was one of the largest groups in the Procession and our Booth had steady traffic throughout the day. Most visitors left with a UUAsheville memento.

Rev. Audette in conjunction with Gender Equality NYC presented the webinar *'Everything You Wanted to Know about Trans, Non-binary, Intersex and Gender Expansive Folx, but Were Afraid to Ask'* Passcode: d*SzZ5EC.

Rev. Audette and the Pride+ Team hosted a hot dog cook-out and BINGO/ Vespers. We had a full house and folks had the opportunity to learn more across the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Our main goal this coming year is to renew UUAsheville as a Welcoming Congregation, to participate in the Justice Ministry Council's activities and continue to establish relationships with other LGBTQIA groups in the community. We also want to provide opportunities for all the LGBTQIA members and friends of UUAsheville to have fun and strengthen their bond with the congregation.

Rev. Audette's dedication to engaging the challenges and celebrations of the LGBTQIA+ communities both within and outside our congregation has provided the team with hope and motivation to accomplish more in the coming year.
Submitted by Bernise Lynch

Environmental Action Team
Co-chairs: Venny Zachritz, Kate Jerome


Roadway clean up crew on State St. in West Asheville

The mission of the Environmental Action Team is to share with the congregation ways to advocate for Climate Justice. This includes the support of members to attend conferences and workshops on Climate Justice. Consequently, several of our group members were able to attend the Creation Care Alliance workshop in early February gleaning information and support from CCA. This information was then shared with the congregation via our newsletter. CCA is a local organization whose mission is to help connect faith groups in the community and share ideas on gathering support in congregations for climate justice. The environmental action team is actively using some of these ideas to develop events for the congregation.

In March there was a change of leadership within the group with Wink Zachritz and Ed Prestemon stepping away and Venny Zachritz and Kate Jerome taking the lead. We also changed the group name from Environmental Action Committee to Environmental Action Team in the hopes of sounding more inclusive.

The April 21 Earth Day service was co-arranged by EAT and Rev. Claudia. Three members of the group participated in the service as we recognized and lifted up our 7th Principle. Plant-based snacks were provided by the group during the social hour.

Blue Horizons will be sponsored by EAT in May as a program presenter to the congregation. Their information will include ways to use tax deductions to environmentally upgrade homes.

This spring the congregation voted to support 3 justice groups. The support will be through the involvement of ministers and members of the congregation. Climate Justice was one of the groups selected. Therefore, the summer Common Read will be coordinated by EAT and facilitated by Rev. Audette. And in September we will host a 2-day Climate Justice Revival facilitated by the UUA. Information about the Revival will be shared with Creation Care Alliance and the community.

Finally, with the assistance of GreenWorks, several community cleanups are being planned for the warm months. These dates will be shared with the congregation, specifically targeting our newcomers.

We would like to thank Ed Prestemon and Wink Zachritz for their past leadership. And also a special thanks to all group members for their continued support and contributions.
Submitted by Venny Zachritz and Kate Jerome

<u>Anti-Racism Immigration Justice Action Group (ARIJAG)</u>
Council Representative: **Ed Prestemon** / **Fredda Mangel**

Following **Carol Buffum**'s move to Atlanta last year, **Ed Prestemon** began the year as the facilitator for the group and its liaison to the Justice Ministry Council. **Fredda Mangel** later took up both of these roles.

Led by **Katie Mitchell** and **Sharon LeDuc**, several people from our group and the congregation worked with the Welcome Circle to help settle an Afghan refugee family in Asheville. This effort continued for the past two years and culminated with the family receiving asylum from the United States government. This event was celebrated at a Sunday service in April.

Jensen Gelfond led a group reading and processing the book "My Grandmother's Hands". ARIJAG members continued to participate in the Dismantling White Supremacy Support Group, despite small turnouts, because this work is considered to be important. A Hood Huggers tour of Asheville for ARIJAG members is also scheduled for May.

Several group members volunteered in different groups in the area including CoThinkk, Asheville Prison Books, Blue Note Junction, Story Medicine for Racial Healing, Faith 4 Justice, and the Racial Justice Coalition.

We typically met monthly but reduced participation has been an issue. Efforts have increased to recruit new members, typically from tabling performed between services by the Justice Ministry Council.
Submitted by Ed Prestemon and Jensen Gelfond

NOTE: Rev. Claudia has joined our team as co-chair. We will end the year with a Hood Huggers Tour as we strive to strengthen and rebuild our team as well as explore ways to be more engaged beyond our four walls.

<u>UU Justice Ministry NC/ UU the Vote</u>
Congregational Liaison: **Joanne Fox,** Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

UU Justice Ministry NC
UU Asheville is well represented during weekly Friday Action Hour Zoom meetings led by Rev. Lisa Garcia-Sampson as multiple UUCA members regularly participate. Each week, we learn about actions we can take on topics of education, LGBTQ+ protections, access to health care, voter suppression, economic and environmental justice and often there are guest speakers or film clips.

In October, Joanne Fox traveled to Raleigh to attend the first in person gathering since 2019 of UU Justice NC participants from across the state. We networked, shared stories, celebrated our successes from 2023 such as the expansion of Medicaid and discussed the challenges we would face in 2024.

In March, Joanne attended the first quarterly UU Justice NC liaison meeting via Zoom led by Rev. Lisa Garcia-Sampson. Roles and responsibilities of the UU Justice Congregational Liaison were clarified, and we previewed planned actions for 2024 UU the Vote Campaign. It was recommended that liaisons recruit assistance for the work ahead.

UU the Vote
We are gearing up for a challenging election cycle here in North Carolina and at the National level. Rev. Lisa has been meeting weekly with the executive director of Carolina Jews for Justice (CJJ) to plan actions we can take together. UU Justice NC and CJJ are partnering with organizations “You Can Vote” to train folks to register voters at community events, “Democracy NC” to train folks to become vote protectors, and with “Blueprint NC” to train on election interference “SEAL” teams.

We held a “UU the Vote National launch” watch party in Sandburg hall on March 14 hosted by Rev. Claudia and Rev. Lisa Garcia-Sampson was a featured speaker for the National UU the Vote launch.


Carolina Jews for Justice and UU Justice Ministry NC Executive Directors share a message via Zoom at the Interfaith Get Out the Vote Event

In collaboration with Lisa Forehand, statewide organizer for Carolina Jews for Justice and Sam Hausfather, from Congregation Beth Ha Tephila, Joanne and Rev. Claudia hosted an Interfaith Get out the Vote Event on April 10 in Sandburg Hall. It

was attended by 36 people with a nice mix of UUs and Jews. The event was mostly activities to get to know each other and information on actions we can take together to encourage participation and protect voting rights. There will be opportunities for postcarding, phone banking, voter registration, canvassing, driving people to the polls, vote protector training and more.
Submitted by Joanne Fox

NOTE: Although we have 10- 50 participants in get out the vote events, it has been challenging to recruit team members to help plan and organize events. In May, Joanne Fox and I joyfully welcomed two members to our team: Rhonda Galey and Dianne Rham.

<u>UU Animal Ministry Asheville Chapter</u>
Chair: **Iris Williams**

Following Jeff Jones' move to Atlanta, an email was sent to the group to remind everyone of the UUAM Mission to build justice and compassion for all animals and to assess interest. Responses indicated interest in the following activities and actions:

- animal sanctuary visits
- plant based potlucks
- plant based cooking classes
- ethical eating course
- book group
- support for local humane societies and dog transport
- multigenerational events
- tabling at coffee time on Sunday (information & possibly food samples)
- collaboration with SJ Film Night (table for information & food samples)

June - There was a get acquainted plant based potluck picnic and planning meeting. Plans were made for becoming an official chapter of UUAM and a tentative calendar of activities was created. Ten people were in attendance.

August - A get acquainted lunch meet-up at Pulp & Sprout was offered. Five people attended.

September Kick-off Event - Partnership with Film Ministry to screen "Eating Our Way to Extinction". 26 in-person attendees and 12 on zoom UUAM AVL Chapter provided plant based snacks and handouts relating to the film topic. It was well received and additional people requested the film link.

September - We became an official chapter of UUAM with the name UU Animal Ministry Asheville Chapter. UUAM provides monthly zoom chapter leader meetings. Iris Williams attends regularly.

October - Intergenerational - The Monarch Butterfly Crisis was featured for the month with a focus weekend October 6-8. Information was on the BB in Sandburg Hall and the eNews. Film Ministry screened "The

Monarch, A Butterfly Beyond Borders", followed by a brief talk by Jennifer Oversmith about creating a backyard monarch habitat, and a handout was available. There was considerable interest and questions. On Saturday, UUAM members prepared an area in the backyard of 23 Edwin. On Sunday, UUAM and a few RE children planted the flowers for the monarch habitat. Signs and plant labels were created and added later. A colorful trifold and new handout was created for the Opportunity Fair. Two UUAM members staffed the table and four people signed up to be on the email list for UUAM activities.

November - Cruelty free Thanksgiving was the theme for the month. Two chapter members tabled on Sunday, November 5th with information and food samples. Five additional people signed up. The bulletin board and eNews featured information on turkeys.

December - Dinner meet-up at Plant with ten attendees.

January - Demonstrating our Values Through Eating (DOVE), a 5-week ethical eating/cooking program was facilitated by Bob and Rebecca Bringle. They promoted the course to the congregation on Sunday mornings. There were eight participants.

February - Community Drive for Brother Wolf Animal Rescue for all four Sundays in February that was promoted in the eNews, the bulletin board, and Sunday slides. Jane Friedman organized and delivered the donations to Brother Wolf.

March - Chapter lunch get together and planning meeting at Pulp & Sprout. Twelve people attended.

April - Partnership with Film Ministry for screening of "The Smell of Money". Five chapter members tabled and handed out film flyers on the Sunday before the film. Five additional people signed up for UUAM activities. At the screening, chapter members provided plant based pork alternatives and distributed literature. Twenty-one people attended the film.

May - Plans for a "Ditch Dairy" campaign in recognition of Mother's Day to honor mothers of all species. There will also be a business/planning meeting in May.

June 9 - Plans for a plant based pot luck for the congregation following the 11:15 service.

August 4 - Plans for the chapter to lead Sunday service.

There are currently 37 people on the UUAM Chapter Roster; however, only 15 have attended an event, business meeting, or tabled. Additional members contributed to the Brother Wolf Drive.
Submitted by Iris Williams

Community Plate

Team: **Cheryl Perry, Kay Aler-Maida, Rhonda Galey, Linda Kooiker(chair), Nancy Miller Green, Marianne Newman, Mary Campbell**, Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

Community Plate functions as UU Asheville's social justice philanthropy. Congregational members nominate an organization. The CP team evaluates their applications and decides which organizations will be CP fund recipients.

Recently we revised the CP guidelines to make them more inclusive and to indicate our support of organizations serving and being led by People of the Global Majority. We also revised the guidelines to indicate we will prioritize supporting organizations that align with the social justice emphases the congregation voted on. These are voting rights, reproductive rights and climate change. We will plan to fund BeLoved as we have an ongoing relationship with that organization.

We continue to fund some of our local grassroots organizations. These organizations are doing work in Asheville and Buncombe County. Members of the congregation are encouraged to educate themselves about each organization and to volunteer if possible.

During this church year, we have funded the following organizations. Bountiful Cities, Ministers' Discretionary Fund, Mel Hetland Scholarship, Blue Note Junction, Tranzmission, BeLoved and will fund Prison books in May and June.


One of our Soul Matters Groups chose as their justice project wrapping books for CP partner Prison Books.

Total collected as of the end of March was $18,274. An anonymous donor matched up to $2000 for the UUCA-Hetland scholarship.

Justice Ministry Film Night

Organizer: **Charlie Wussow**

Film Night continued on Zoom only in May and June 2023. We started showing films on Zoom and onsite beginning with September 2023 and will continue to do so in the future. We do not show films in July and August.

In general, Zoom attendees outnumber onsite attendees. Several people do not drive at night, and others have just gotten comfortable with watching the film on Zoom. Average monthly attendance was approximately 20 - 30, mostly UU members.

The public mailing list is still approximately 300 households, however, attendees are mostly UU members, which was not the case in years past. We receive more responses from the mailing list than the eNews. We have started posting flyers around town, as of March.

License fees this year have been $150, unchanged compared with last year. We have started receiving small donations from onsite attendees. We have no way of knowing how many donations are received from Zoom attendees.

The following films were screened this fiscal year, including May and June 2023 films not selected as of last year's report:

- *Stewart Udall - The Politics of Beauty*
- *Unbreathable, and Upstream Down River (2 short films)*
- *Eating Our Way To Extinction (partnership with UUAM, Asheville chapter)*
- *The Monarch, A Butterfly Beyond Borders*
  A Monarch habitat was planted by UUAM members in conjunction with the showing of this film
- *Town Destroyer*
- *Who We Are, A Chronicle of Racism In America*
- *Unspoken, Racial Divide in America*
- *Union Maids (Women Labor Activists in the 1930s)*
- *The Smell of Money - Pig farm environmental damage, racial injustice, and animal cruelty in eastern North Carolina (partnership with UUAM, Asheville chapter)*
- *Death By Design, The Dirty Secret of Our Digital Addiction*
- *Regenerating Life*

Submitted by Charles Wussow and Iris Williams

From the Director of Administration

A/V & Services

One of the main goals of this past year has been to find ways to optimize our A/V resources, so we can continue to provide the best possible productions and services for the congregation and staff. This has been a challenge given the ever-increasing demands for A/V requirements.

Streamlining the production of our regular Sunday services and monthly Vespers has become reliant on the use of Google-Drive. It continues to be an ideal way to manage the documents and media required, and when combined with the on-line use of Canva, our team can now collaboratively design, share and repurpose content for different uses

We have also been working on developing a detailed A/V operational manual, in addition to quick start user guides for use by staff and congregants. The first iteration of the A/V operational manual was completed this year, detailing the steps involved in producing our Sunday services. The manual, which will continue to be updated as a "living" document, covers areas like media preparation, video/audio operation, programing, troubleshooting and live streaming.

Given our budget limitations we are fortunate that our A/V equipment has remained fairly robust and reliable. We did however introduce some new equipment like The Meeting OWL to improve the experience of online meetings, and we recently replaced our failing microphone system in Sandburg Hall which we discovered was well over 20 years old.

One of our biggest ongoing challenges is the continued search for additional A/V techs to occasionally run our regular services, and provide audio-visual support for group meetings and non-service programs. We are staying hopeful that we will have a few extra folks trained and ready to step in by this summer.

Submitted by Simon Jacobs

Human Resources

The highlight of the year, staffing wise, for 2023-24 is without a doubt the official installation of the Rev. Dr. Audette Fulbright Fulson as our Lead Minister. The act of installing a new minister with a congregation is a sacred act, and to commemorate it we held a special service of music, celebration, and installation on Sunday, November 5th, 2023 at Warren Wilson College, followed by a reception in Sandburg Hall. Both events were heavily attended by both congregants and clery from Western North Carolina and beyond.



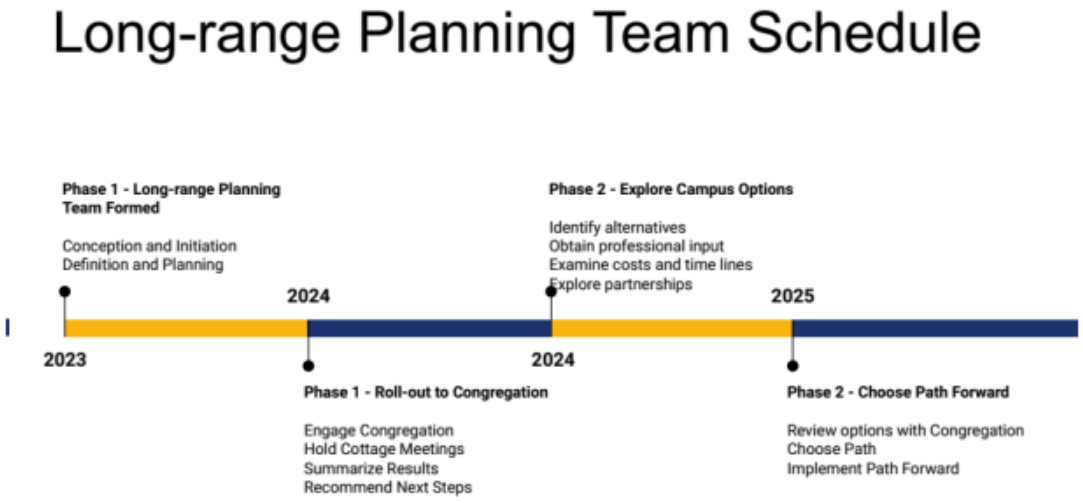
This year also saw the hiring of three essential members of our staff team. Aja Gaul, our Administrative Specialist, who is responsible for our database management and eNews, amongst other things began in December of 2023. Trevor Johnson our new Connections Coordinator began shortly after in February of 2024. Long time bookkeeper, Christine Ray resigned when she was invited to step up as the Director of Administration at her home congregation in Charleston, South Carolina. Our current bookkeeper, Maria Hill, began in April of 2024.

Long Range Planning

Team Members: John Bates, Adam Griffith, The Rev. Dr. Audette Fulbright Fulson, Walter Zachritz, Wendy Motch-Ellis, Marta Reese, Gerald McLellan, and Bill Clontz

The Long-range Planning Team was established in the Fall of 2023 and is a joint activity between the UU Asheville Board of Trustees and Executive. The charge of the Team is: to Identify and prioritize capital and infrastructure needs for our properties based on lifespan, cost, and necessity. Explore potential special asks of donors to fund specific needs.

The Team has been meeting twice monthly and has extensively discussed how we would best fulfill the charge to the Team. We decided that we needed two phases; phase one would be to share information with the Congregation and to ask two probing questions so we could hear from the congregation. The second phase in year 2 would include more detailed work, likely involving an outside professional, to design and cost out alternatives for our UU Asheville campus.



As part of our engagement with the congregation, we formulated a theme for our work: Dreaming Today...Envisioning Tomorrow. We also shared our initial vision of this work noting that, as we begin this work together, in small group gatherings and meetings we'll be sharing important basic information about our campus and current resources, so we can all start from some common understandings about our congregation

at this moment in time. With this information, and building on the many conversations and ideas for our future that have been outlined during the recent Lead Minister search and Start Up period, we'll share that feedback with the congregation and ask some new questions of you, with a goal of articulating some choices and a timeline for making decisions about how to build an exciting and abundant future for UU Asheville.

Over 40 people have attended the small group meetings. Topics discussed include accessibility, creating a welcoming environment, improving existing spaces, and considering potential expansion or relocation. The discussions reflect the congregation's desire to create a more inclusive, functional, and sustainable space that meets the evolving needs of its members and the community.

Buildings & Grounds

The continued running of our campus would not be possible without our talented Building Managers and Building Coordinators. Special thank you to Glenn White, Jon Bates, Connie Silver, Joe Penno, Steven Carter, Natalie Polinko, Graham Graham, and Venny Zachritz for all their help in managing repairs, responding to minor emergencies (like flooding from heavy rainfalls!), working with our service providers and making sure all of our events and rentals run smoothly and safely.

Rentals & Events

2023-24 have been a full year for events and rentals at UU Asheville. Our concert series brought in congregants and community members alike to experience the work or artists like Holly Near, Peter Mayer, and Melanie DeMore. We had numerous memorial services and one-time special events. We have added recurring renters like Good Trouble WNC, to our long-standing rental groups, which include: Buncombe County Board of Elections (Poll Place) Friends of Mine Preschool Asheville Music School Asheville Chamber Music Series Narcotics Anonymous Sierra Club Women's Song.

Capital Repairs

Below is a short summary of the history and current state of capital repairs on our Buildings and Grounds from 2022, onward.

In 22-23

- Completed full inspections of 21 & 23 Edwin and beginning general repairs and safety items that have been on hold
- $50k allocated for 21 & 23 Edwin items of need from capital repair ($16k and $34k contingency)

In 23-24

- 21 Edwin was taken off-line due to repair needs Based on repair estimates, the Board tapped the Long-Range Planning Team (LRPT) to explore best options and alternatives based on needs before we invest >$120,000 into 21 Edwin
- Comprehensive long-range planning process established by the LRPT Phase I: Rollout & Small Group Planning Sessions completed; website page

Anticipated (with the input of our Long Range Planning Team)

In 24-25

- Continue Phase I: LRPT to summarize themes from Small Group Planning Sessions
- Phase 2: Explore Campus Options based on needs/directions
- Phase 3: Choose Path Forward

Future & Beyond

Full UUA GIFT (6.5% of expenses = additional $15,226)
Continue Strategic Visioning for Fiscal Sustainability (Need new revenue streams & increase membership/donor base)

Landscaping

The Landscape Committee (a division of the Environmental Action Team) has been hard at work to improve the physical campus of the congregation.

We are still working to eradicate invasive species and incorporate pollinators, native plants, and food plants as suggested by the Green Sanctuary certification program. We are moving toward our goal of turning the campus from an intensively managed landscape with high input into a sustainable landscape with low input. We intend to become a resource to educate the congregation and community while beautifying the campus. We will continue posting some informational signs and being willing to discuss the concepts of sustainability with anyone interested (congregation and community).



The volunteer landscape crew has been working tirelessly to plant, transplant, and generally keep the grounds in a healthy state. The pollinator garden started two years ago is coming along spectacularly, as is the renovation and maintenance of the rain garden. This year we've planted a wildflower garden and a butterfly garden (overseen by Jen Overstreet), and renovated and planted the patio hillside. Most of the shade-loving plants for this garden were donated by the congregation.

Memorial Garden

The Memorial Garden volunteers have teamed with the Landscape crew for an improved composting system. We have harvested some lovely compost this spring to provide a boost to the garden. Several new, donated, native plants have been added, within and outside the fence. We and the landscape crew continue to remove invasives when time permits. Our volunteer numbers have reduced (lost 2 gained 1). We currently have coverage for each week of the month and would welcome additional volunteers.
Jody Watts
Memorial Garden

Membership

The 2023-2204 church year was a year of transition and change for the Membership and Connections Coordinator spheres o f UU Asheville's ministry. The first half of the year, Venny Zachritz was the staff member, continuing to do the work of the Connections Coordinator position while at the same time building in some structures for her departure in early 2024 and for the hiring of the new Connections Coordinator: me, Trevor Johnson. While it has been a whirlwind of a transition, the past few months have seen many successes. There have been changes to the structure and focus of the position as well; the position is now supervised by the Lead Minister, for instance. Some of the legacy systems and tasks have also been reconfigured as necessary as well.
The primary foci of this report are as follows.

- Newcomers and New Members by the numbers
- Newcomers practices
- Membership in concept and practice
- Care Connect Team
- Social groups
- Volunteer coordination and Sunday corning logistics
- Collaboration with other staff

By the numbers: In 2023-2024, as of the beginning of May, there were 7 newcomer gatherings. The February, March, and April gatherings attracted 18, 8, and 20 newcomers, respectively. On average, there are 4-5 newcomer/visitor connection forms filled out each week on Sunday mornings. In terms of membership, we gained 25 new members as of May 10 for the 23-24 year. Of those, 10 were added as a result of the membership class in March. We also have a growing list of newcomers and attendees who have specifically expressed interest in becoming members: 63.

I have been learning what it is that creates a welcoming environment for newcomers in our community and improving on that space as I can. The aforementioned newcomer gatherings are key, and create that initial

space for newcomers to share about themselves, taking a chance to be vulnerable. Keeping spaces that are open for newcomers to explore the community during any time of the church year is also essential. Rev. Claudia's "Taste of Soul" events have served that well, as have the ongoing classes this spring.

Membership in practice has been in discussion between Rev. Audette and myself this spring. We've talked about expanding how the congregation engages membership to include those who are long-time members who are continuing to grow both in their spiritual journey but also in their relationship to the congregation. We also discussed and have put into practice an expanded view of "annual commitment form" and "annual recorded contribution" to include contributions of time and talent. This spring also saw the return of the in-person membership class (which hadn't happened since the pandemic). The class created some vital conversations about what membership means in our community and resulted in 10 new members joining either the day of the class or in the following two weeks.

The Care Connect Team was a group that upon my arrival into the position was looking to replace many team members who had stepped aside. This spring, Tory Schmitz and I have worked to reform the team with some new goals and have had our first meeting on May 14. The initial Care Connect Team was a post-pandemic response to reconnecting with lapsed members or long-time attenders. The new team will continue the work but also utilize different models to help long time members grow their relationship to the congregation as well as continue to do the work of welcoming newcomers.


2023 UU Opportunity Fair

Another important part of my work these past few months has included identifying and connecting with the array of Social Groups that we have here in the congregation. These are the groups that don't necessarily fall under the Justice ministry or Religious Education umbrellas but still serve a vital place of creating those opportunities for connection. Often these groups (like the UU Hikers or the Fiber Friends) do connect with areas of the Justice ministry. In the past months I have also fielded a few proposals for new Social Groups and have been helping the leaders get those off the ground.

Sunday mornings are the primary connection point for me and newcomers and attenders interested in becoming members. It is also where I do a fair bit of volunteer coordination, ensuring that we have an ongoing team of ushers and hospitality volunteers to make Sunday services run smoothly. My first Sunday on the job was the first Sunday of moving to two services. Helping to manage that transition was the very first challenge I faced and has resulted in what seems to be a Sunday morning with more space for our diverse congregation to meet one another. That said, it did stretch the already taxed group of hospitality

volunteers. I've been working on recruiting more and have specifically asked many newcomers and new members in order to create a larger pool of volunteers.

Lastly, my work has led me to successful collaborations with other staff members and their areas. This has included Simon Jacobs in making sure that Sunday worship happens smoothly, Jen Johnson in planning youth-led services and speaking with COA and YRUU youth about membership, and directing new members and newcomers who are interested in helping with Faith Formation programming to either Rev. Claudia or Kim Johnson.

Submitted by Trevor Johnson, Connections Coordinator

Finances

Legacy Circle Committee

The purpose of the UU Asheville Legacy Circle committee is to encourage members of the congregation to consider UU Asheville and other Unitarian Universalist entities in their estate planning and to provide members with guidance on strategies for using trusts, annuities, retirement plans and insurance to optimize their estate planning. This year, the committee has continued to meet one-on-one with members of the congregation in furtherance of that purpose.

The Legacy Circle, those who have submitted an intention form documenting a planned gift, now includes 86 individual members representing 58 households. This year the Legacy Circle welcomed one new member, Bernise Lynch. The committee maintains an updated honor roll of those members above the fireplace. The Legacy Circle plans to replace the printed scroll with a digital display which will include not only a list of the Legacy Circle members but will include pictures of and testimonials from Legacy Circle members. The cost for this display will be paid for using funds donated this fiscal year expressly for this purpose.

This fiscal year we gratefully received funds from the estates of Mark Ward and Art Poultney which were directed to either the endowment fund or were unrestricted according to the wishes expressed by the donors.

This year the committee reached out to each of the households containing Legacy Circle members with a special Valentine's Day card thanking them for naming UU Asheville in their estate plans.

The Legacy Circle Committee includes James Cassara, Judy Harper, and Gene Lambirth. We are now recruiting UU Asheville members and friends to serve on the committee for the 2024-25 year. Anyone interested should contact any of the current committee members.

Submitted by Gene Lambirth

Annual Giving Drive



" We are the Lighthouse Keepers"

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville has been a shining light in this community for 70 years. The lighthouse, standing tall and steadfast against the elements, symbolizes our commitment to Unitarian Universalist values, and to serving all who seek solace, community, and a spiritual home. For more information on our 2024 Annual Giving Drive, check out this presentation from our 2024 Budget Town Hall, held May 5th, 2024.

23-24 Operating Budget

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville 10/11/2023

Operating Budget Overview

July 2023 through June 2024 Cash Basis

	Jul '23 - Jun 24
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
4100 · Contributions	
4110 · Commitments, Prev Donor	640,000.00
4130 · Commitments, New This FY	10,000.00
4140 · Reserve/Uncollected Commitments	(38,400.00)
4150 · Postpaid Commitments	9,600.00
4160 · Other Operating Donations	50,000.00
Total 4100 · Contributions	671,200.00
4200 · Earned Revenues	
4210 · Investment Earnings	28,000.00
4230 · Rentals	18,000.00
4240 · Registration Fees	500.00
Total 4200 · Earned Revenues	46,500.00
4300 · Fundraising	45,000.00
Total Income	762,700.00
Gross Profit	762,700.00
Expense	
6100 · Programs/Ministries	
6110 · Worship & Music	
6111 · Worship	
6112 · Guest presenters-fees	2,250.00
6113 · Guest presenters-travel	750.00
6114 · Worship Associates	200.00
6116 · Worship Supplies	1,500.00
Total 6111 · Worship	4,700.00
6120 · Music	
6121 · Music Presenters	11,600.00
6125 · Music Supplies	2,525.00
Total 6120 · Music	14,125.00
Total 6110 · Worship & Music	18,825.00
6130 · Care & Connect	
6131 · Pastoral Care	750.00
6133 · Membership/Connections	1,750.00
6141 · Other Congregational Events	4,000.00
6142 · Hospitality / Coffee Hr	750.00
6145 · Community Events & Ads	1,750.00
Total 6130 · Care & Connect	9,000.00
6150 · Justice Ministry Outreach	
6151 · Justice Ministry Gen	3,000.00
6152 · Environmental Action	750.00
6153 · Universal Rainbow Unity	1,300.00

	Jul '23 - Jun 24
6154 · Anti-Racism & Immigration	2,100.00
6156 · Economic Justice	600.00
6157 · SJ Film Series	1,800.00
Total 6150 · Justice Ministry Outreach	9,550.00
6160 · UUA Connections	
6161 · UU Relations	500.00
6162 · UUA Annual Program Fund	33,318.00
Total 6160 · UUA Connections	33,818.00
6170 · Faith Development	
6171 · FD Supplies	2,500.00
6172 · Background Cks-volunteers	1,100.00
6173 · FD Hospitality-food & gifts	1,900.00
6174 · Leaders/Teachers Training	1,500.00
6175 · Coming of Age	3,000.00
6176 · Youth Activities	500.00
6177 · Adult Faith Development	3,800.00
6178 · Family Ministry	2,000.00
Total 6170 · Faith Development	16,300.00
Total 6100 · Programs/Ministries	87,493.00
6200 · Personnel	
6210 · Salaries & Wages	
6211 · Ministers	130,848.00
6212 · Music Dir	49,845.00
6213 · Administration	125,801.00
6214 · Religious Education	77,548.00
6215 · Care & Connect	16,986.00
6216 · A/V Technicians	27,872.00
Total 6210 · Salaries & Wages	428,900.00
6230 · Professional Expenses	
6231 · Minister Prof Exp	8,800.00
6232 · Faith Dev Minister Prof Exp	5,748.00
6233 · Admin Prof Exp	5,933.00
6234 · Music Dir Prof Exp	3,988.00
6240 · Non-exempt Staff Development	3,000.00
Total 6230 · Professional Expenses	27,469.00
6250 · Other Personnel Expenses	
6221 · Pension	41,258.00
6222 · Ministers Housing	51,000.00
6223 · Ministers FICA	13,911.00
6224 · Disability Insurance	6,028.00
6225 · Health Insurance	30,802.00
6228 · Payroll Taxes	22,801.00
6255 · Dental/Vision	1,728.00
6257 · Life Insurance (NTax)	1,339.00
Total 6250 · Other Personnel Expenses	168,867.00
Total 6200 · Personnel	625,236.00

	Jul '23 - Jun 24
6300 · Office Operations	
6305 · Computer/Printer-new & maint	4,000.00
6310 · Office Supplies	1,800.00
6315 · Telephone/Internet	6,000.00
6320 · Computer Software & Subscripts	10,500.00
6325 · Office Equip Leases	16,750.00
6330 · Furnishings, office	500.00
6335 · Postage	750.00
6340 · Accounting/HR	2,825.00
6345 · Printing/Copying	250.00
6350 · Bank & CCard Fees	4,200.00
Total 6300 · Office Operations	47,575.00
6500 · Buildings & Grounds	
6510 · Bldg Maint & Repair<$1K	6,500.00
6520 · Utilities & Recycling	18,500.00
6530 · Cleaning Supplies	1,200.00
6540 · Grounds (Landscape/Snow)	3,000.00
6550 · A/V Equipment - new & maint	1,000.00
6560 · Furnishings, non-office	500.00
6580 · Property/Liability Insurance	11,383.00
6581 · Workers Comp	1,200.00
Total 6500 · Buildings & Grounds	43,283.00
6600 · Contract Services	
6605 · Administrative Services	500.00
6610 · Accounting Services	31,300.00
6620 · Cleaning Service	32,000.00
6630 · IT Services Contract	8,288.00
6650 · Bldg & Campus Contract Services	10,981.00
Total 6600 · Contract Services	83,069.00
6700 · Stewardship/Fundraising	
6710 · Annual Budget Drive	3,200.00
6720 · Legacy Circle	700.00
6730 · Other Fundraising	10,100.00
Total 6700 · Stewardship/Fundraising	14,000.00
6800 · Governance	
6810 · Board of Trustees	1,000.00
6820 · Leadership Development	600.00
Total 6800 · Governance	1,600.00
Total Expense	902,256.00
Net Ordinary Income	(139,556.00)
Other Income/Expense	
Other Income	
7100 · Community Support Income	20,000.00
7500 · Transfers from Other Funds	
7523 · Tfr from Contingency	149,556.00
Total Other Income	169,556.00

	Jul '23 - Jun 24
Other Expense	
8100 · Community Support Disbursements	20,000.00
8500 · Transfers to Other Funds	
8521 · Tfr to Capital Fund	10,000.00
Total Other Expense	30,000.00
Net Other Income	139,556.00
Net Income	0.00