



First Unitarian Universalist
Church of Columbus

2025/2026 ANNUAL REPORT

A vibrant and inclusive community committed to fostering spiritual growth, social justice, and compassionate connections.



firstuucolumbus.org



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Governance

2026 Board Of Trustees



Betsy Smalley
Co-Chair



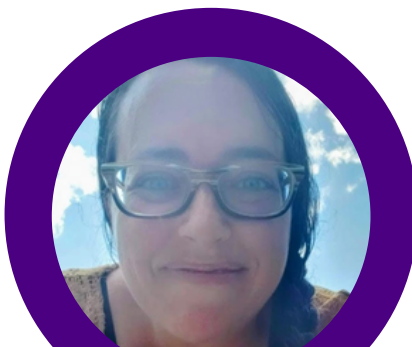
Bill Fiorini
Co-Chair



Chris Sullivan
Treasurer, Trustee



Kristen Hartmann
Secretary, Trustee



Tara Mullins-Cosme,
Trustee



Cara Seidt,
Trustee (Appointed),
Legal Counsel

2026 Board of Trustees

The past year has been a season of deep reflection, intentional transition, and positive growth at the First UU Church of Columbus. As a congregation, we have successfully faced financial hurdles by leaning into our core values of collaboration, creativity, and mutual care. Several new families joined our congregation, and we continue working to ensure our community is more welcoming and inclusive for all visitors and guests. The Board of Trustees has sought to lead this effort, and meaningful progress has been achieved due to the dedication of staff, volunteers, and members across the congregation.

At our August 2025 summer retreat, the Board set three key goals for the year: Financial Sustainability, Governance, and Intergenerational Community-Building. We made significant progress and achieved major milestones in all three areas.



Cindy Whicker
Past Board Chair (ex officio)

Violet Davidson
Youth Board Rep



Not pictured: Luca Wolfe, Youth Board Rep,
and Sarah Mayabb, Trustee (Resigned)

Governance

2026 Board of Trustees (continued)

Financial Sustainability

A task force consisting of Board members, staff, Finance Committee members, and congregants met six times over three months to explore pathways toward a more sustainable financial future for our church. The group considered strategies to increase revenue, reduce expenses, and improve investment returns.

Achieving a flat budget at the recommendation of the task force was highly challenging this year. Driven by rising healthcare and energy costs, the Board made the difficult decision to postpone hiring a part-time Social Justice Minister. For the same reason, staff salary increases were capped below both inflation and the UUA fair wage guidelines.

One significant outcome of the task force was the Board's endorsement of the Finance Committee's recommendation to move endowment funds to a Vanguard account, which will generate stronger investment returns once we have an investment policy statement. Additionally, the staff has worked diligently on the upcoming fiscal year budget to reduce costs wherever possible.

To boost revenue, the team is exploring several exciting projects. These include expanding our rental income, hosting various events, such as a farmers' market, a craft fair, and pop-up merchandising shops, and developing new ways to engage and thank major donors.

Governance

The Board made several important governance improvements this year:

- Operating with just six members made it incredibly difficult for our Board to sustain its workload, especially when unexpected health or family emergencies arose. To build a stronger, more stable and resilient leadership structure, the Board proposed amending the Constitution to expand from six to nine members. The congregation overwhelmingly approved this amendment at the February 2026 Mid-Year Meeting. The Nominating Committee has actively recruited four new Board members to help lead us into the coming year.
- The Board also revised the Articles of Incorporation on file with the Ohio Secretary of State to more accurately reflect our vision and mission. To ensure we handle conflicts fairly, the Board updated and approved our Covenantal Relations Policy. This policy introduces a dedicated Covenantal Relations Team to help navigate disagreements within our church community.
- Significant Board attention was dedicated to personnel matters. Rev. Terasa Cooley's employment contract was successfully extended, securing her role as Lead Minister for up to six additional years. Concurrently, church legal counsel, Cara Seidt and personnel liaison, Cynthia Mercer, are working with Trustee Kristen Hartmann to prepare formal employment contracts for all senior full-time staff while updating the Personnel Handbook to enhance organizational policies.

Governance

2026 Board of Trustees (continued)

Intergenerational Community-Building

The Board continues to support a wide range of initiatives that foster intergenerational community. These include the NoUUrsh service, Religious Exploration programming, senior programs, incorporating a Time for All Ages into Sunday services, the Labor Day retreat, First Friday meal gatherings, and many others.

We remain committed to finding new ways to connect members across generations and strengthen relationships throughout our congregation.

Other Significant Accomplishments

- The Board supported several capital projects that improved church facilities while advancing our environmental and financial goals.
- Additional solar panels were installed on our roof, reducing both our carbon footprint and electricity costs. The kitchen received much-needed appliance upgrades, including a new induction oven and dishwasher that will improve efficiency and lower energy use.
- The Board and staff also partnered with the Columbus Foundation to access Foundation-managed endowment funds designated for Slowter Lounge improvements to purchase new carpeting for the Worship Center and Slowter Lounge areas.
- Another important cost-saving improvement was the installation of LED lighting throughout First UU and the School for Young Children. In addition, the parking lot west of the main entrance is scheduled for repaving during the summer months.
- To build a more open and collaborative culture, the Board continued its commitment to strong communication. We sustained our collaboration with staff through monthly Steering Team meetings and regular staff reports presented at Board meetings. The Board is deeply grateful for our staff's dedication, skill, and hard work; their commitment is vital to our congregation's success.
- Finally, we maintained open lines of communication with church members via monthly Board Bulletin emails, in-person conversations in Beach Hall after Sunday services, & hybrid Board meetings open to all.

While this year brought significant financial and structural challenges, it also revealed the deep resilience, creativity, and commitment of our volunteer leaders and staff. By strengthening our governance, securing our ministerial leadership, and opening new avenues for revenue and communication, we have built a solid foundation. We look forward to stepping into the coming church year with renewed hope, deeper connections, and a shared commitment to our vision and mission.

Additional Congregational Leadership



Chas Williams
Moderator



Marc Pinsonneault
Finance Chair



Cynthia Mercer
Personnel Liaison

Governance

Nominating Report

The Nominating Committee is a committee of the congregation at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus. We frequently refer to ourselves as “NomCom,” and our purpose is to recruit, screen, and nominate church members for the Board of Trustees, Board Moderator, and Nominating Committee. We seek to acquaint ourselves with members of the congregation whom we might not otherwise know, and to select the strongest candidates we find for these key roles in our church.

The Nominating Committee consists of six members. Every year, three members rotate off the committee and the church elects three new members to a 2-year term. The former Chair or Co-Chair of the Board of Trustees is a non-voting member of the NomCom, acting as the committee’s liaison to the Board.

This year, with the congregation’s approval to increase the Board of Trustees from six to nine members, we were tasked with finding five new Board members. We nominated four new members (3 for 3-year terms and 1 for a 2-year term). If these nominated members are confirmed by the congregation, this increases the Board membership to eight for the 26–27 church year. Beginning next year, adding three new members to the Board of Trustees will increase and maintain a board of nine members.

The final slate of four Board nominees along with the nominees for Board Moderator and Nominating Committee was published on May 22, 2026 in the church newsletter. In May, we held candidate “Meet and Greet” sessions in Beach Hall to introduce nominees to the congregation.

In the coming year we plan to greet newly elected members and thank retiring members of the Nominating Committee with a potluck at the end of the summer. In the fall we will meet to renew our covenant with each other and set our agenda for the year. Current plans call for us to meet with the Anti-Racist Curriculum Task Force and to transition Nominating Committee files from member accounts to the church’s Google drive.

2025 Nominating Committee Members



Eddy Fried



Jack Holdford



Mark Krueger



Gabe McDonald



Denise Riffle



Victoria Yanovich

Above,; Cindy Whicker, Board Liaison (P4)

Governance

Archives Team and Historian

Archivists: Team: Linda Thompson (Church Historian), Archivists: Linda Royalty, Jan Waters, Marilyn Beerman, Jane Reisman, Deb Baillieul, Debbie Shaw, Olwen Firestone, Ohma Willette, Sylvia Howe.

Mission Statement: The mission of the Archives Team and Historian is to collect, preserve, and make available for research and reference the records which reflect the origins, programs, goals and development of the First Unitarian Universalist Church. The Team provides information that assists the operation of the church along with serving members of the church and community in their historical research. (Reviewed and revised in 2026)

In late August 2025 Rev. Dr. Teresa Cooley presented a sermon including a brief history of our church. A timeline of the church was displayed in Beach Hall for several months. Our plan is to continue to provide the congregation with a comprehensive review of the ups and downs of First Unitarian Universalist Church. In September we began to work on our first goal: Clean and organize the Archives Closet. As of June, we have made good headway. We have transferred the files in the banker's boxes to 3-ring binders, thus making them more easily accessible. The newsletters, Board Minutes, Ministerial Records, Ordinations, Councils, newspaper articles, Auction, Long-range Planning, Worship and Stewardship are now in binders. The Wednesday Night Chalice Group has volunteered to help us with heavy lifting and restructuring the shelving system. We look forward to their assistance.

For years the Library and the Archives Team discussed what to do with the Orton Collection of books. (Professor Edward Orton Sr. was the first President of the Ohio State University and first geologist at the University. He was also the State Geologist. In 1963 the family donated his philosophy, religion and science books to First Unitarian Church. The dedication plaque suggests the reason the books were given to us, "...A contemporary historian described him as a heroic figure in the struggle between the old orthodoxy and the liberal positions of the Unitarians".) Many of the books were molding, decaying and falling apart. In our research, the Ohio State University did not want the books for their collection, nor did the Ohio Library. We discovered that many of the books are available online. In 2025 when Slowter lounge became the family room during worship, the books were moved to our library. In consultation with the Rev. Dr. Teresa Cooley and Rev. Susan Ritchey, Debbie Shaw and the Archives Team reviewed, sorted and relocated the books. Susan Ritchey took the books that were useable to add to the UU House library at the Methodist Theological School of Ohio, where she teaches.

Our goals for the coming year are as follows:

- *Continue to educate the congregation about the history of the church*
- *Expand the collection to include dated documents and minutes from ALL groups*
- *Take attendance at every Team meeting*
- *Continue to have fun together*

Respectfully submitted by Sylvia Howe with help from the Archives Team

Congregational Life

Congregational Life Overview

Congregational Life here at First UU continues to grow! This year, working with Robin Lawson as our Congregational Life Assistant has been a delight and her contributions to not only congregational life but all areas of the church have been instrumental in getting more done. We have also welcomed Tanvi Bhowmik as our new bookkeeper and it has been a true joy to work with her and bounce ideas for how to make our bookkeeping and finances more efficient.

We have a lot of exciting plans for the future, especially building on and continuing some of the great things we have accomplished this year. From Chalice Circle groups to Pathways to Membership to our Engagement Circle, we are getting creative in ways to help all of us feel more connected with this community. We continue to increase our use of Realm and will be continuing to introduce new features in the new church year that will help all of us to connect with one another in a number of ways.

Over this year we have:

- Welcomed Tanvi Bhowmik as Bookkeeper
- Offered 8 Pathways to Membership classes and welcomed 20 new members
- Explored and utilized Realm in new ways
- Switched from Quickbooks to Realm Accounting
- Reinvigorated our Congregational Life Planning Team
- Run four Chalice Circles that are working their way through curriculum centered around our new UU values
- Introduced quarterly opportunities for groups to gather together to share information and learn how we can better support one another (Engagement Circle)
- Worked hard to prepare for a shift to year-round giving
- Started laying the groundwork for a more robust planned giving program (Acorn)

In the upcoming year you can look forward to:

- more Chalice Circles
- a switch to year-round giving
- opportunities to gather with new members to get to know one another in deeper ways
- exciting new ways to engage with Realm
- volunteering opportunities, and even more!

It has been an absolute joy working with all of you over this past year and I can't wait to see what else we can do together! Our world needs the lifesaving sanctuary of Unitarian Universalism now more than ever, and it is an honor to create this space of comfort and safety, justice and hope, love and perseverance, with each and every one of you.

Blessings,
Rev. Kelli

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Rev. Kelli McNeal
*Minister of Congregational
Life & Financial Manager*

Congregational Life

Discussion & Conversation Groups

All Ages YA Book Group

Erin Reilly-Sanders

The All Ages YA Book Group creates community among readers from different generations, expanding our knowledge of and forming empathetic connections to people, places, and information through books. January 2026 was our ten year anniversary! As of May 2026, we will have read 113 books together at a rate of 1 per month. We are always happy to have people join us or follow along with books on their own- our list of what we've read over the years is available online at www.firstuucolumbus.org/yabooks

ASH: Atheists-Skeptics-Humanists

David Krohn: Chair, Tom Baillieul: Program Chair

Mission statement: We come to this church from many backgrounds, religious and non-religious, seeking community, support for open inquiry, and values that are not based on fear and superstition. ASH is a long-standing relational group that welcomes new members and supports each other in a larger world that is often hostile to non-believers (i.e., the "Bible Belt"). Our monthly programs cover a wide range of topics including: discoveries from genetics to cosmology, ideas from archaeology and Native American history, and social justice topics including engagement with prison reform and voting rights. In November, First UU member Don Merrill spoke about his recent book, "Pledge", a history of public broadcasting in America. In February, First UU member Kari Hicks talked about becoming an activist and organizer for the group 50501. Over the course of this year, we organized A-S-H member participation in several of the "No Kings" rallies. In the near future, we will be working with the Anti-Racist Allies to complete the ARA rubric.

Keep on Keeping On Group

Denise Deschenes

Formerly known as "Keep on Moving," this small group is for persons who are experiencing chronic pain or other chronic and/or progressive medical conditions. The support we provide to one another is critical to helping us through the unpredictable and complicated experiences of living with chronic conditions. Unfortunately, one of the members of our group passed on this past year. Their presence is missed as she served, unknowingly, as a mentor to others in the group. We have changed our meeting time from 7-8:00pm to 3-4:00pm (via Zoom) to accommodate persons who find they are better able to engage and connect earlier in the day.



Congregational Life

Discussion & Conversation Groups, continued

Second Wednesday Evening Book Group

Susan Carr

This group meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month at 7 pm. There is a strong core of attendees, and we joyfully welcome newcomers! We meet in-person at the church April through October, and on Zoom from November through March. This group usually selects books by genre, rather than title—this year, we selected a common title to read every three months, and members selected different books of a common genre or author to read during the other months. Some of this year’s past genres include: a book by a favorite author that you haven’t read; a science book about the brain; a Western; a Mystery; a collection of short stories; a Novel in Verse. Titles we have read together include: Downstairs Girl; Master Slave Husband Wife, and All the Light We Cannot See. We also did an “author study” and we all read any book by Sarah Addison Allen. Upcoming selections: June: Family of Spies, July: Stamped from the beginning—the congregational read, August: any Pulitzer Prize winner, September: Falling into a Good Life by First UU member Laurel Richardson. Each member of the group has the opportunity to suggest a topic or a title.

Women’s Book Group

Susan Carr

The First UU Women’s Book Group meets monthly on the fourth Wednesday via Zoom at 1 PM. We are a lively group that moved to Zoom during the COVID pandemic and decided to continue in that format mostly due to the large number of members. Books are selected by the group and titles cover a wide range of styles and genres—some that are challenging; most are fiction. Our past year’s titles included: Woodworking by Emily St James, Good Material by Dolly Alderton, One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia, Harlem Rhapsody by Victoria Christopher Murray, Three Days in June and A Spool of Blue Thread by Anne Tyler, On Tyranny and On Freedom by Timothy Snyder and James by Percival Everett. Recently we read Martyr by Kaveh Akbar.

Small Groups & Social Groups/Gatherings

All Soles Contra Dance

Jan Phillips

The All Soles Contra Dance is a social function of First UU, organized around 2000 by Kate Power, giving the dance a 26 year history. The dance is a family-friendly event where children can hang out next to the dance hall while their parents dance. Many UUs dance and/or are members of bands that play for All Soles. This past year has seen an increase in attendance, bringing younger dancers from throughout our region. New this year, All Souls is now an afternoon dance: Beginners’ Session 1:30 to 2:00; Dancing from 2:00 to 4:30. Dancers, callers, and band members have been gathering for dinner at a local restaurant after the dance, inviting deeper community.

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Congregational Life

Small Groups & Social Groups/Gatherings, continued

Care & Share Time Bank

Vilvi Vannak

The purpose of the CSTB is to build a trusted, safe community wherein individual and organizational members can exchange their skills, interests, and acknowledgements through the use of time credits and by so doing meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life. We create and enhance community through mutual caring for one's neighbors, nurturing each other by showing that everyone can contribute - regardless of money, and celebrating the contributions of all people to making individual lives better. We encourage social justice by valuing the talents and abilities of each other. We engage in diversity by welcoming all people as strengths for our community. Empowering individuals is facilitated by our valuing and rewarding time spent contributing by all. We prove to each other that each of us has value. From rewarding a person who lends moral support to another to rewarding members for helping the greater community, we affirm that YOU have value and contribute.

We also value making connections and improving ourselves and our community. Over the course of a year we have at least six guest speakers to educate the community on a large number of issues and organizations. These meetings are open to all individuals, including the members of the UU Church. We requested volunteers for UU functions -such as the UU Auction and clean-up days, and the UU is always welcome to ask our membership to volunteer for events. Also, UU members and all others are always welcome to join us at our monthly potlucks. Also, we have voted in new board members to the CSTB and are excited to bring the new energy this board has to do big things this year! After reviewing the UU Church's JAM page, it seems that the CSTB could collaborate to further many UU goals for social justice and for building community. We would welcome opportunities to work with many of the JAM groups.

We plan to grow our membership through engaging with the greater community in and around Columbus. We will be engaging by placing flyers in businesses inviting new people to our events, we will be hosting more informational events to teach others about time banking, and we will be continuing to grow our online presence to have even more information about our efforts available for the community to see. Through these efforts we will strengthen our local community and share the knowledge of self worth to others. The CSTB welcomed 63 new members in 2025; we currently have 592 members. We hosted 12 potlucks. We had 541 exchanges in total; 374 of those were exchanges between members, and the remaining 167 reflect time credits given to new members, time credits given to potluck attendees, etc.

Central Ohio UU Walkers

Erica Scurr Coordinator

On March 20, 2026 we celebrated 15 years hiking the trails at Highbanks together! Between 3-22 attendees hike each week, depending on the weather. We support our congregation's mission through social interaction and community building, all while experiencing the web of life walking in nature.

Congregational Life

Small Groups & Social Groups/Gatherings, continued

Dinner & Conversation

Marcia Canter

Members of Dinner & Conversation groups gather to share three meals together per quarter. At least 65 church members participate annually. In the second quarter of 2026, there are 5 groups with 36 participants. The purpose is to get to know others in the church while having a good time. This is a low risk social event accessible to church members who want to make connections with others.



First Friday

We welcome all to First Friday! Come enjoy a delicious meal and the company of our community members of all ages! Gluten Free and Vegan Options served. We have experimented with alternating hosts, engaging our groups and teams who took turns hosting and providing programming, with a Kitchen Captain each month to help point the way and guide them. One group even served breakfast for dinner! Our volunteers have all done a great job - Many Thanks to everyone who participated for helping make this a fun and rewarding experience! Over the Summer, we will again transition to a bring-your-own-food picnic on the South playground, enjoying a relaxed outdoor gathering. In the coming year, we are seeking a small team to cook each month, with rotating volunteers for the programming, setup, and cleanup tasks.

Monday Men's Spirituality Group

Frank Phillips, Organizer

We provide a safe place for our members to share thoughts and feelings and to experience spiritual growth. We meet our congregation's mission by creating community and engaging diversity. 8-9 men meet 2-3x/month.

Millennial Covenant Group

Gabe McDonald, Ben Sostrum

The Millennial Covenant group is a diverse and energetic group of millennials and millennial-adjacent folks. Our group holds two meetings each month: one is a social event, and the second is a covenant/chalice group meeting. Childcare is provided as needed. During 2026, we held potlucks, went on hikes, held a christmas a pajama party and blessing exchange, hosted First Friday spaghetti dinner, and more. We are planning to do a service project in coordination with building administration in the coming church year.

Congregational Life

Small Groups & Social Groups/Gatherings, continued

Rainbow Connexion

Bob Rice

This affinity group for folks “on the LGBTQ+ rainbow” meets the third Friday of the month. We use a Google Group to send meeting notifications out to 120 people prior. Meetings always include a check in where folks can share about life events. We are seeking group members to assume leadership positions.

Trans and Non-binary Support Circle

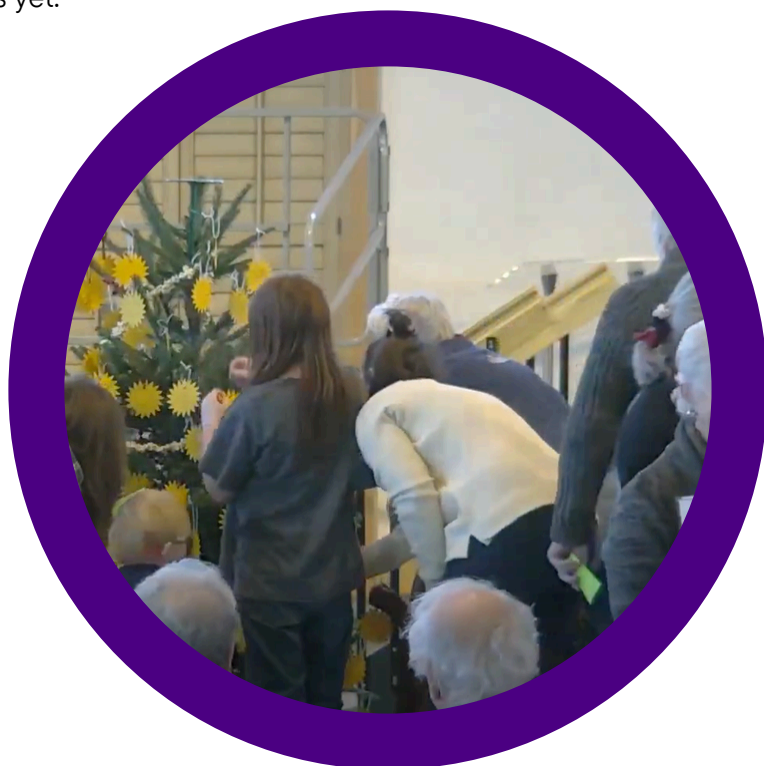
Rikki Wagener, Victoria Yanovich

This welcoming and open minded group offers support and advice. We are here, and we are not judgemental. Greater understanding will make us stronger. Attendance has been small, though we occasionally have new attendees. We've backed off of Youth and Family/Allies meetings for now, due to lack of interest. We have discussed opening the Circle outside of the 1st UU community, especially contacting Stonewall. We also hope to widen our availability to outside 1st UU by opening the Discord channel, mostly for those who don't attend services or are not members yet.

CUUPS

Myra Hartmann

Our Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans chapter continued to meet and attract new members this year. CUUPS brings together individuals from diverse nature centered paths to share their knowledge and rituals in an open and supportive group setting. This year, in addition to meeting monthly on the second Wednesday; our members wrote and presented both the Remembrance and Yule services at 11am. This summer, we will be taking a trip to Mohican State Park to watch the lunar eclipse. All who are interested in joining us to learn more are welcome. For more information contact myra@firstuucolumbus.org



UU Christian Fellowship

Rev. Kelli McNeal

The UU Christian Fellowship is in its second year here at First UU. This year, we explored Covenant in the Bible, read Christ for Unitarian Universalists, and are currently making our way through Biblical Literacy for UUs. We welcome anyone who identifies as a UU Christian, a Jesus follower, and anyone who is interested in re-examining Liberal Christianity from a UU perspective.

Congregational Life Teams

Congregational Life Planning Team

The Congregational Life Planning Team (formerly named the “Membership Team”) continues to meet and plans to accomplish some big tasks in the upcoming year. We have begun conversations to gather stories of how First UUers were experienced welcoming when they came to our community, so that we can continue to lean into what works, and find areas where we can do better. We are also looking to create more clarity around different paths available for people to find connections within the congregation, and find ways to make those connection points easy to find.

Welcome Team

Our Welcome Team provides a warm presence to visitors and members alike as they arrive on Sunday mornings. Welcome Team members have the first opportunity to greet people as they come into the building and make sure that everyone feels welcome as they arrive. We do this in 3 places: Greeters at the entry doors from both the Weisheimer Road and the High Street parking lots, Greeters at the Welcome Center, who provide nametags and information to newcomers, answer questions, and assist in getting connected. The third group of volunteers are ushers who distribute Orders of Service, receive the offering, and more. The Welcome Team is always looking for volunteers, and this is an easy entry into volunteering for First UU, giving new members an opportunity to meet and interact with many members of our church community.

A Note From Robin:

In my first year, I have felt a warm welcome as I get up to speed with my duties. I truly love serving in this capacity. I am a life-long Unitarian Universalist who has been incredibly active in our congregation and I feel grateful to be able to support of so many areas of Congregational Life. I am serving the congregation as staff and work collaboratively with staff, church leadership, and volunteers to meet the needs of the congregation.

During my first year here, I earned certification from the UUA Sparks Program in Volunteer Development and I also joined the UU Association of Membership Professionals, attending their “Professional Development Days” conference just last month. Making connections with members here at First UU and with other membership professionals has been deeply inspiring and rewarding. I look forward to seeing First UU continue to grow and change, and I look forward to learning, growing and being challenged to improve together.



Robin Lawson
Congregational Life Assistant

Ministries

Lead Minister's Report

When I think back to the beginning of this church year, I remember the fear and hope that were roiling inside us about the impact of the US Presidential campaign. That anxiety of “not knowing” has now morphed into the sometimes despairing “what can we possibly do?” While I share the frustration and anxiety of the moment, I think that we, as a congregation, have answered the question about what we can possibly do. We have been building a community of care and concern. We have been welcoming new people seeking a place of safety and congruence. We have been taking our financial needs seriously and responding with

generosity. We have supported Feed and Read Ohio in providing over 3000 meals for families in need of support given their vulnerability to ICE. We have created hundreds of whistle kits for distribution. We have participated in dozens of protests. We have been, in short, a congregation that has gathered strength and responded with love, even in the midst of a world on fire.

It has been truly wonderful to work with our Justice and Equity Student Minister, Paisha Thomas, who has challenged us to look deeply at the ways in which we participate in white supremacy culture. And she brought us the most amazing gospel worship service in which we learned an expansive understanding of the theological meaning of gospel music. With the great assistance of our various Anti-Racist groups we have been learning and growing and making new commitments to change.

It has been exciting to see the Board of Trustees make a commitment to anti-racism this year, as well as to support our efforts toward inter-generational connection and financial sustainability. I look forward to working with an expanded Board next year that will assist us in engaging in strategic planning as we look with excitement toward the future of what our congregation can become.

I am proud of the efforts of Rev. Kelli McNeal and Brian Hagemann to curtail expenses and help us get closer to a place of financial sustainability as well as to make our budget process more transparent and comprehensible.

I appreciate more than I can say the pleasure of working with all of our committed and dedicated staff that go above and beyond each day to support the work of this congregation. And, most importantly, I appreciate the work of so many committed lay people without whom we would not be able to create the dynamic community that we so enjoy.

Finally, I would like to recognize those who died this church year. They have blessed us with their presence and are greatly missed: Graig Cote, Larry Drake, Pat Larson, Bob Letcher, Lisa Oldendorp, Tom Perley, Jeanni Ray, Tom Roberts, Tom Tucker, and Chuck White.

I look forward to five more years of service among you.

Blessings, Rev. Cooley

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Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley
Lead Minister

Ministries



Senior Gatherings

Senior Gatherings were held four times this past year, continuing a tradition that began in the fall of 2007. These gatherings bring together our senior (age 65+) members, including some who are not able to attend services and other church events regularly. Each gathering provides opportunities for connection with ministers, staff, and one another. The gatherings feature programs developed especially for the occasion, updates on church happenings, food and fellowship. The fall and early spring gatherings include coffee and light refreshments, while the early winter and late spring gatherings feature lunch prepared and served by loyal volunteers. Rides are also provided for those who need them. From the beginning, these gatherings have been popular with both seniors and staff because they foster meaningful connection and community. If you are interested in helping with this important ministry, please contact Karen Keenan or Donna Adassa.

Caring Ministries

The Caring Ministries at First UU provide compassionate and empathetic services to our church community. Caring Ministries include the work of the ministers as well as the trained volunteer services of the Pastoral and CaringTeams.

Pastoral Team

Teresa Cooley, Kathleen Fowler, Ben Blee, David Carr, Doris Cornell, Dick Dawson, Denise Deschenes, Su Ann Farnlacher, Barb Fiorini, Sharon Hamersley, Nancy McDonald-Kenworthy, Dana Reynolds, Julia Sargent, Betsy Smalley, Pat Snyder, Chris Sullivan

The Pastoral Team is a one-on-one or virtual group ministry in which trained pastoral team church members support other church members in a confidential and compassionate relationship. While they are not trained therapists or social workers, team members receive training on active listening, grief, loss, caregiving issues, mental health issues, plus the realities about substance abuse, aging, death, dying, boundary limits and confidentiality. The Pastoral Team works to extend pastoral care beyond what our settled ministers can provide. The first meeting of potential members of the Pastoral Team took place on Feb 1, 2002, and this offering of the church continues today, with the addition of Sunday Morning Listeners and two ongoing virtual groups dealing with caregiving issues and chronic medical issues. Occasionally, grief and loss support groups are offered on a limited term basis.



Ministries

Pastoral Team Council

Terasa Cooley, Kathleen Fowler, Ben Blee, Denise Deschenes, Kelli McNeal, Julia Sargent, Pat Snyder

The Pastoral Team Council meets monthly to discern needed pastoral care of members, plan training and gatherings of team members. This group is led by Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley, with assistance by Kathleen Fowler. For any needed information about our offerings, please contact PTC@FirstUUColumbus.org. We invite prospective Pastoral Care Team members to contact us as well.

Caring Team

Jane Reisman, Chris Sullivan, Karen Torvik, Gail Baxter, Nan Beamish, Jane Tessier, Julia Sargent, Kari Ganes and Karla Rinto.

Services to the First UU Community:

1. The Caring Team sent (to date) 119 caring cards for joys and sorrows generated by members. In addition cards were sent to new members, coming of age participants, graduates, teachers, mentors, ministers significant dates, significant birthdays, and other special situations.
2. There are 20 plus volunteers who share writing cards, and sitting at the caring table before and after Sunday services. Jane Reisman coordinates these volunteers.
3. The Caring Team in coordination with the Senior Gathering sponsored an in service on Fall Prevention by the Central Ohio Area Office on aging on March 13, 2026.
4. The Caring Network is led by Karen Torvik and Gail Baxter. Their primary focus is to be proactive in reaching out to members to identify needs. They coordinate meals and rides on a short time basis for members and their families. These supports most often occurs when there is an injury, illness or death.
5. Memorial Service Receptions are coordinated by Chris Sullivan, Karla Rinto and Nan Beamish. There were 9 Memorial Service Receptions coordinated this past year to date for current and former members. There are 2 more Memorials scheduled in June. There are many dedicated volunteers who provide food, setup and cleanup and serve as ushers, greeters and servers.
6. The medical equipment loan is coordinated by Jane Tessier. Some of the equipment loaned this year included, wheelchairs, walkers, and shower chairs. Jane also spoke to the Senior gathering in December to update the list of equipment she maintains.
7. Holiday Cards: Cards are signed by the members and sent to Ministers, staff members, teachers, and former Ministers.

Priorities for the future:

The Caring Team continues to recruit new members and volunteers to continue our mission.

Prepared by Karla Rinto, Caring Team leader.

Ministries

Alternative Worship

Our focus is creating and presenting experiences that welcome everyone and offer new paths of spiritual development. While our focus is building spaces where those who don't connect with typical services can explore what it means to be in a spiritually focused community, we've discovered the result is an experience that even traditionalists tend to enjoy. We're always happy to welcome new members to the team; there are many opportunities from creating whole services, performing music or provide readings. We have quarterly planning meetings that are open to all. Contact Christine Davidson if you are interested in getting involved or would like to share an idea.

Expressive Worship

Focused on the intersection of art and community, Expressive Worship offers fresh avenues of spiritual and creative exploration. This service continues to be a space where participants can engage with their faith and world outlook through diverse artistic media. By integrating creation into worship, we provide a unique and enriching experience that fosters deeper connections both with ourselves and with one another. This approach has offered a new spiritual practice to participants as well as strengthened our relationships with each other. Attendance continues to vary month to month, from a few to a few dozen. All ages and abilities are always welcome.



The format is: greeting and introduction, chalice lighting, song, first reading, work time of about 40 min, second reading, another work period, chalice extinguishing, quick cleanup and finally a sharing circle for those who want to share what they were working on. Participants are welcome to work on the theme or do what speaks to them in that moment, there is always a provided project as well as basic supplies available or sometimes folks bring their own projects to work on. We'd love to see you on a fourth Thursday!

Nourish

We've offered this format as the 9:15am service again this year after settling into a 'regular crowd' last year. Nourish is an intentionally more embodied experience that takes advantage of being offered to a smaller group that continues with its steady core of attendees as well as frequent visitors. Most services are designed to last around 45min, the centerpiece is the reading of a children's story aloud and attendees then sharing their reflections to create a communal sermon. There is often a small meditation, discussion or art project that ties into the service theme as well. While there is more interaction between attendees than in a traditional service, it is designed to be equally welcoming to introverts and extroverts. We would love to add a musician or two to the team who could accompany or lead our hymn, if you might be that person let the alternative worship team know!

Lifespan Religious Exploration

Religious Exploration Jump-Start

Thanks to all who joined us this past fall in reimagining the role of multigenerational ministry and family programming within our congregation as part of this retreat with facilitators from our regional UUA staff team, Cassandra Montenegro and Beth Casebolt. This event included efforts to engage interest in and reestablish our congregation's RE Family and Adult Teams, a group of stakeholders and helpers that look at the big picture to help advise the DRE and implement program improvements. These groups are still forming, and will convene in mid to late summer in preparation for overseeing programming and multigenerational ministry in the new church year. Interested parties can email amber@firstuucolumbus.org



Amber Scott
Director of Religious
Exploration (DRE)

DRE Professional Development

2025-2026 was my first full church year serving First UU as an Advanced Level Credentialed Religious Educator! In addition to hosting and helping to facilitate the Jump-Start last fall, I participated in several regional trainings, and continue to serve our faith as a Youth Program Coordinator for Central East Region Summer Institute. Rev. Kelli McNeal and I are excited to be celebrating seven years of service! I have served First UU as your professional religious educator since August 2019, and have been part of our congregation since I became an Ohio State student in 2004. I bring my skills as an art and early childhood educator, and expertise from over two decades of peer leadership as a UU youth and young adult to this vocation.

Family Religious Exploration Program (Children and Youth)

We welcomed many new families and visitors this year! The 2025-2026 church year saw ~120 children and teens registered to participate (and there are ~160 folks ages 17 and below currently listed in our database). More than 45 Sunday school teachers, RE staff members, and other volunteers worked together to support our family programs!



Weekly attendance through the regular church year included 40-70 young people in the building each Sunday that classes were held, with 20-30 adults on duty supporting them. On Sundays without classes (such as holidays) we may have had as few as half a dozen children and teens present, and we tend to have one or two dozen in attendance each week through the summer (Memorial Day through Labor Day). With most classes happening during the 11am service, we used almost every available classroom space most Sundays. In the fall we will again offer a full range of classes during the 11am service (which involves up to nine classes during service, and as many as three after service activities). Continuing 9:15am Nourish provided exciting opportunities for families to build community in multigenerational worship.

Family Religious Exploration Program (Children and Youth) (cont'd)

We continue to offer many vital programs, including Our Whole Lives sexuality education (in a time plagued with discriminatory legislation targeting LGBTQ+ folks, and in a state that requires schools to teach abstinence or submit dissent). Huge thanks and congratulations to Deb Baillieul, who started teaching OWL in 1998 and is finally retiring from being a facilitator! Deb will be greatly missed in the 6-7 year-old OWL classroom. This past year we ran Neighboring Faiths, a program in which middle schoolers learn about other faith traditions, visit a wide variety of local places of worship, and hear from guest speakers representing these communities. And this coming year we plan to continue Coming of Age, a program where teens explore their personal beliefs, and were excited to have the involvement of many lay leaders, in addition to a host of our community's current and retired ministers.

We are always seeking more volunteers to work with every age group - and in particular, we need more OWL sexuality education facilitators and youth advisors. Email amber@firstuucolumbus.org to get involved! More info about our full range of family activities: <https://firstuucolumbus.org/learning/sunday-school/>

Youth Group

Victoria Yanovich, Youth Group Coordinator

Youth Group is carrying out the mission of First UU by creating and nurturing community among middle and high school aged youth in our congregation, starting at age 12. We empower the youth to work for justice through learning and reflecting on current events and our shared values. We practice and embrace diversity through welcoming to new folks who attend and join our group. We have passionate youth interested in UU and we are always seeking more youth and adults to help out. We might be small in numbers, but we are mighty! We average about 3 to 4 youth per our bi-weekly gatherings. We tend to have more who show up to our field trips, or to our events that are open to the entire congregation (like our dance). We are aiming to spread the word about Youth Group to other teens, and are looking for someone age 25+ to step in as coordinator (includes a \$1000 annual stipend), as Victoria will be stepping down at the end of the current church year to be a regular youth advisor. Contact amber@firstuucolumbus.org



Religious Exploration

Amber Scott

Multigenerational Ministry

Anti-Racism Learning for All Ages

Starting this summer, we are doing a congregational read of the many different versions of Ibram X. Kendi's book, *Stamped from the Beginning*, which includes a YA/teen remix, a children's version, a graphic novel, and even a Netflix special. We will also soon begin recruiting facilitators to get trained on the UUA's new Mosaic Lifespan Anti-Racism Curriculum! We plan to schedule adult modules and fold some of these lessons into our existing classes for children and teens this fall. Those interested in facilitating for any age group can contact amber@firstuucolumbus.org

Adult Education

I look forward to continuing to work with lay leaders to get more classes and activities off the ground in the coming year. I am grateful for and impressed by the many talents and gifts that our community shares with one another! Have an idea for a new program or class? Contact amber@firstuucolumbus.org

Rising Young Adults

RYA is a group for young adults, 18 to 25~ yrs, that meets every 2nd and 4th Sunday. Our meetings alternate between social gatherings and life-skill demonstrations. Some of these past workshops included learning how to change a tire from Billy Davidson, visible mending with Jacinda Baker, cooking demonstrations from Teddy Davidson, and multiple sessions on filing taxes. Lately we have been focused on highlighting our group members' talents and interests through special interest presentations. We have learned about train mechanics, linoleum printmaking, and different deer species. We were able to fundraise ~\$250 through a print on demand stand (using the linoleum blocks we made during the demonstration) to take a trip to the Newport aquarium. As a group we are committed to uplifting and enabling our diverse young adult peers to live a fulfilling life. We aim to provide a place for all rising young adults to feel included, heard, and in community.



(New!) UU Theology & History Discussion Group

Dana Reynolds

We started the prior year known as the "UU Theology Book Group." Now, we have incorporated UU history themes as well. We have even branched out beyond just books, to include transcripts of lectures and addresses. A new name for us, might it be in the works? We began the year in September, reading and discussing "On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers," by Friedrich Schleiermacher (possibly losing members in the process). We then took up Emerson's "Divinity School Address," a transcription of his July 15, 1843 lecture. Finally, we read and discussed Cynthia Tucker Grant's "Prophetic Sisterhood." We are discussing possible books, and even streaming media, for possible use next church year.

Older Adult Programs: Tai Chi & Aging Well: Intentionally!

Betsy and Guy Smalley

Two programs were offered for older adults in the congregation this year. One is an ongoing class for Tai Chi for Balance, a tai chi program designed specifically for older adults. Over 20 people took part in this program. The other is a wellness workshop, Aging Well and Intentionally; this workshop is essentially an OWL program for older adults. Though registration was initially capped at 15, the workshop accepted 19 registrants due to high demand. Others were interested but could not be accommodated in this 10-week workshop. The workshop addresses issues such as movement and nutrition, dealing with loss, identifying that which brings meaning to our lives, social isolation, and decisions about optimal living as well as end of life. Both programs underscore the need for more RE opportunities for adults.



Niki Ducey
RE Assistant



Gus Serbin
Sunday RE Assistant

Social Justice

A Note From Paisha Thomas

During my student ministry field education at First UU, I spent most of my time collaborating with the ARA Planning Team, and the ARA Curriculum Task Force along with Amber Scott, Director of Religious Exploration. In addition to my work on both ARA Planning, and ARA Curriculum, I collaborated with JAM which included their financial support of the Black Gospel service which was called True to Our Native Land. You will see my name in the annual reports from the two ARA teams.



Paisha Thomas
Justice & Equity
Student Minister

Justice Action Ministry

Social justice work at First UU is coordinated by our Justice Action Ministry (JAM) through quarterly JAM Council meetings. This has been a year of transition for JAM, with the departure of Rev. Amanda Hays, but we've been grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from our student minister Paisha Thomas.

Anti-Racist Allies Planning Team

Linda Loesch, John McCrystal, Rev. Lynda Smith, Amber Scott, and Paisha Thomas

The Anti-Racist Allies Planning Team (ARAPT) supports our congregation's mission statement by "Working for justice (specifically racial justice) by learning, reflecting and doing." The mission of the ARAPT is focused on learning, action and community building in an effort to defeat racism in ourselves and in systems we participate in and benefit from. We work to be a diverse multicultural beloved community where we all thrive. We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. The ARAPT provides and coordinates programming that includes training, workshops, social events and conversations on a regular basis.

The ARAPT plans actions for the congregation as a whole in collaboration with the Board, staff and congregation, while forming task teams and working groups to plan actions within specific categories. This past year the planning team held a service conducted by Rev Lynda Smith, based on Michael Eric Dyson's book "The Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America". Another anti-racism service, titled "When? Reflections on Dr Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was given by Paisha Thomas in February.

Another major project this year has been to work with several groups within the congregation to complete the "Racial Justice in UU Congregations Rubric". The results will provide a good indicator of where our congregation may want to focus. Other expected benefits of this effort are education, self-reflection, the importance of curiosity, deeper awareness of what it looks like to be an anti-racist congregation, and to bring together the various communities that make up our community to think and talk about racial justice.

Social Justice

Anti-Racist Allies Planning Team (Cont'd)

This past year the ARAPT formalized the ARA Experiences Working Group to plan lunches at minority owned restaurants and other activities. ARAPT also formed the ARA Curriculum Task Force to research and recommend an anti-racist curriculum for our community that provides learning opportunities for those new to anti-racism work along with more advanced learning opportunities for those already immersed in this work. This team has outlined exciting plans for education and action. The ARAPT is working to prioritize and help implement their recommendations. Also, a Working Group to plan and provide programming for quarterly gatherings for graduates (i.e., Alumni) of our ARA training programs. The ARAPT also formed a team to plan a congregational, multigenerational group read. The book, available in various formats, is *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X. Kendi. Several opportunities for discussion are planned. There will be sessions over the summer and in the fall when various age groups will be included. Finally, the ARAPT is in the process of forming a team to enhance the ARA presence on our church's website.

We encourage all of you to become involved in anti-racism work with openness and curiosity in a way that meets your interests and needs. We consider this anti-racism work to be a moral issue; one that recognizes the history of slavery and that recognizes the humanity of Black people and the need for justice in the present. We invite you to join us as you can. If you would like to take on a leadership role, please let us know. We hope you will join us in working towards becoming an anti-racist congregation.

BREAD Team: Building Responsibility, Equality, and Dignity

Chris Johnson, Alice Rathburn, and Marilyn Webster

First UU is a founding member of BREAD, our congregation-based community organization made up of almost 40 diverse Central Ohio congregations. Every year BREAD identifies and researches community problems and then presses local officials to take evidence-based steps to address those problems.

BREAD demonstrates its people power every year at the Nehemiah Action. This year BREAD congregations turned out 1,471 people to the Nehemiah, including 128 from the First UU community. We celebrated our most recent victory, when Columbus City Council enacted a rental registry BREAD proposed and advocated for to protect renters from predatory landlords.



Social Justice

BREAD Team: Building Responsibility, Equality, and Dignity (cont'd)

In May BREAD won a commitment from Columbus City Schools Superintendent Dr. Angela Chapman to expand the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Academies in Columbus high schools to 10 by the 2029-30 school year, thereby providing graduates with pathways to living wage jobs. BREAD continues to press the city for an ordinance to protect trees on private land under development, despite the resistance we've faced. We have highlighted the role that a reduced tree canopy plays in unequal health outcomes between neighborhoods.



Democracy Team

Chris Johnson, Tam Dalrymple, Hanna Burr, Sara-Jane Workman,

Over the past year our country's democratic system and basic human rights have been under relentless assault. Since, as Joan Baez said, action is the best antidote to despair, the Democracy Team facilitates opportunities for the First UU community to respond to the moment. In our weekly "Democracy Action Hours", we've written letters and postcards to voters, called representatives, canvassed for Issue 5, and assembled over 1300 ICE preparedness kits including whistles and "know your rights" information in English, Spanish, Somali, and Haitian Creole. First UU has shown up in force for numerous protests, and our email list and Signal group have made a difference in keeping people informed.

On May 5, Columbus voters overwhelmingly passed Issue 5, the Community Crisis Response Amendment. This issue establishes a comprehensive crisis response system that will dispatch trained non-police personnel (social workers, peer supporters, EMTs, etc) for behavioral health crises, wellness checks, and other similar situations. First UU was involved in Issue 5 in many ways:

- BREAD's policing research committee was part of the broader coalition that developed Issue 5.
- First UU hosted a community conversation to prepare for the ballot campaign
- We gathered signatures to put Issue 5 on the ballot.
- We wrote postcards, knocked on doors, and stood at polling places to inform voters about Issue 5.

This victory is First UU's victory, and we can be proud of it.

Looking forward, we are in a critical election year, made all the more critical by the Supreme Court's undermining what was left of the Voting Rights Act. Our Democracy Team plans to get even more involved in voter registration and engagement and election protection, in cooperation with local partners like the League of Women Voters and the national UU the Vote campaign.

Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio (UUJO) Spring Assembly

We've been working to revive Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio (UUJO), our state action network which had been dormant for several years. UUJO allows Ohio UUs to collaborate with and learn from each other as we work for justice. In April, First UU hosted UUJO's spring assembly, its first in-person meeting in years, which brought together Ohio UUs from at least eight congregations for discussion, training, and workshops.

Social Justice

Food [In]Security Team

Feed & Read Ohio

Jacques Angelino

This year, we once again encouraged all First UUers to pick up a Feed & Read Ohio green bag at the greeter stand once a month and fill it with food and other essential items for Central Ohio families who are not able to access food pantries or other kinds of resources.



In addition to regular food deliveries, during and after our blessing of the backpacks August service, our congregation blessed and filled backpacks full of school supplies for back-to-school. Around Christmas, we had a Feed & Read Ohio Tree with requested Christmas presents for children and youth. Feed & Read Ohio also gave turkeys and hams for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. If you're interested in learning more, doing a ride along or volunteering, talk with Jacques at the table in Beach Hall after our Sunday Services!

YWCA Meals

Tim Hooks

The YWCA Family Center provides transitional housing and needed services to families with the goal of enabling them to become self-sufficient. First UU continues to provide dinner at the Center each 4th Friday. If you would like to help cook and serve, please contact Tim Hooks.

Eco-Justice Team

This team is a joint effort of JAM and facilities. Please see page 34 for their report.

Fund for Immigration Legal Assistance (FILA)

Jan Phillips

After a period of dormancy, FILA was reactivated during 2026 due to the incredible need for help from our immigrant neighbors. In response to the need for increased funds, FILA undertook a crowd-sourcing campaign through the UUA, and undertook other fundraising initiatives. In this fiscal year, FILA has raised \$41,000 and has approved \$42,000 in assistance (there was a beginning balance of a little over \$4,000). Through over 50 applications, around 70 people have received assistance (including spouses and children). FILA is helping! FILA is now partnering with CRIS, Legal Aid, US Together, the Central Ohio HUB, and other organizations whose missions are to help.

Music Program

Dr. Brandon Moss

Music continues to be a vibrant and vital part of First UU—both its worship life and its community life, highlighted by the activities of three choirs and a thriving Concert Series.

Peace Pals

Peace Pals, our children’s choir, has grown in number this year thanks to Erin Rothert’s leadership and regular twice-monthly rehearsals after the service. The group sang in two services, as well as December’s Music Sunday service and the May Spring Choir Concert.

Chalice and Spirit of Life Choirs

Both adult choirs have continued to recruit and retain new members. In addition to singing at the regular 11:00 am services throughout the year, both choirs were featured at December’s Music Sunday service, which was again a successful Lessons & Carols service. The ensembles also combined for the Spring Choir Concert in May, which carried the theme “I Am America” in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The music chosen sought to highlight a wide span of American voices and also thematically spoke of immigration. The choir directors and Nathan Hamm, pianist, continue to work hard to program music and grow the choral library with pieces that speak to a variety of musical tastes and styles and that reflect a diverse and inclusive pool of choral composers. Spirit of Life Choir director Michaela Brown resigned at the end of the church year after eight years of service, in order to focus on her family, self, and full-time job as a middle school music teacher.

Concert Series

First UU offered an exciting concert series for 2025–26. Concerts this year included Leonela Alejandro, the winner of the 2024 Guitar Foundation of America competition; singer-songwriter and church member Katy Oberle; a collage of local choirs from Otterbein University and Big Walnut, Hilliard Davidson, and Upper Arlington High Schools; Columbus Women’s Chorus; and local favorite Bill Cohen. We also continued a years-long partnership with the world-renowned Carpe Diem String Quartet, which held five concerts at First UU this season. Our Concert Series is fully self-funded through concert donations, though most concert donations go directly to the performing artists.



Dr. Brandon Moss
Music Director
Chalice Choir Director



Nathan Hamm
Accompanist



Michaela Brown
Spirit of Life Choir
Director

Stewardship & Fundraising

Stewardship

Our switch to Realm for managing giving has received amazing feedback! If you have given to First UU, be sure to log in to your Realm account to see a record of your giving, update your giving information, or get a statement - there's so much you can do! In the early Fall, look for the roll out of our transition to Year Round Giving. If you donate to other nonprofits, you will be very familiar with this type of giving. Stay tuned for a complete explanation and your Membership Month grouping very soon!

Auction Team

Danya Furda, Jim Pinkham, Susan O'Donnell, Laura Ahmadian, Candee Rothert, Judy Vazquez, Patricia Boughton, Mary Lou MacDonald, Sharon Hamersley, Jeannie Sperling, Cathy O'Neal, Janet Mangini, Joan Matyskella. Through donations to our annual auction, we facilitate community connections including: dinners, social events, excursions, and services. Our 2026 auction theme was "Making Waves." Thanks to your generosity, we raised \$32,604 at this year's auction. We had so much fun with the 140 attendees who were able to attend this year. Thank you to everyone who contributed items, events, and services - we were able to offer over 216 things for people to bid on. We are always looking for energetic, creative people to join our planning team, so please let us know if you would like more information on how you can help with future auctions.

Treasurer Report

Chris Sullivan, Treasurer

A lot has changed in Fiscal Year 2026 - we switched accounting systems from Quickbooks to Realm Accounting which enabled us to have better connection between contributions and our financial statements. We also changed our accounting method from accrual based accounting (which is helpful for businesses who maintain inventory) to a modified cash based accounting (which allows us to track our assets consistent with previous years, but gives us a more real time look at our cash flow). As with all major transitions, we ran into many hurdles and hiccups along the way, but we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

In August, we welcomed Tanvi Bhowmik as our new bookkeeper. Tanvi has been working hard to not only learn First UU's accounting practices, but working alongside us as we learn our new accounting software too.

For fiscal year 2026 (July 2025 - June 2026), we had a balanced budget with the help of Build the Bridge and unrestricted funds. The staff did a wonderful job cutting back on expenditures which provides us with a more than \$50,000 surplus as of the end of April. Any surplus we maintain at the end of June will be returned to the unrestricted funds.

Fiscal year 2027 is the final year in which we have available funds from our 2024 Build the Bridge campaign to help us cover any revenue shortfalls. The Board has had many discussions about finding new streams of revenue, and you can look forward to some exciting opportunities in the new church year.

Stewardship & Fundraising

Proposed Budget

FY 27 Proposed Budget	FY 26 Budget	FY 26 Projection (As of May 2026)	FY 27 Budget
Revenue			
Donations			
Total Pledges	640,160	627,956	649,000
Total Non-Pledged Donations	77,000	81,334	78,000
Total Donations	717,160	709,290	727,000
Other Income			
Rentals	53,800	60,489	66,780
Activities & Events	8,650	3,583	(800)
Fundraising	21,250	30,436	50,000
Total Other Income	83,700	94,507	115,980
Total Operating Income	800,860	803,797	842,980
Non Operating Income - Transfers In			
From Endowment/Reserve	149,603	149,603	150,000
From Bridge	150,000	150,000	100,000
Other Fundraising/Reserve			43,860
Total Transfers In	299,603	299,603	293,860
Total Revenue	1,100,463	1,103,400	1,136,840

A Note From Tanvi:

I feel very grateful to be able to work here and I have found the environment very warm and friendly. Prior to joining the staff here, I attended some Zen meditation sessions and other spiritual services. I have been working as a bookkeeper for several years for various non-profit organizations and Covenant Presbyterian Church before joining First UU.



Tanvi Bhowmik
Bookkeeper

During my first year here, I assisted with the transition to Realm accounting software in addition to my regular bookkeeping duties. I look forward to continuing to grow and learn new ways in the coming year. My Hindu background has enabled me to appreciate the practice of daily prayer and mantra meditation as a fundamental aspect to my spiritual growth and well-being for which I am very grateful. I appreciate that this Church offers a space where people can worship together, especially in this modern age where people often feel isolated when they are not part of a bigger spiritual community like ours..

Proposed Budget

FY 27 Proposed Budget	FY 26 Budget	FY 26 Projection (As of May 2026)	FY 27 Budget	
Expenses				
Salary & Benefits				
Salary	559,747	556,184	579,257	Note 3
Benefits	182,743	176,945	227,384	Note 4
Total Personnel & Benefits	742,490	733,129	806,641	
Programs				
Total Charitable Giving	34,753	29,967	29,980	
Total Religious Exploration	8,700	3,500	7,000	
Total Ministry & Leadership Teams	31,210	22,045	22,420	
Total Programs	74,663	55,512	59,400	
UUA Annual Program Fund	5,500	5,500	5,500	
Admin & Facilities				
Total Administration	36,500	39,340	38,200	
Total Utilities	62,800	59,381	64,100	
Total Building Maintenance & Repair	88,000	62,305	65,500	
Total Grounds Maintenance & Repair	34,300	30,958	33,560	
Total Insurance	14,720	23,836	22,450	
Total Mortgage	41,489	41,489	41,489	
Total Admin & Facilities	277,809	257,310	265,299	
Total Expenditures	1,100,436	1,051,451	1,136,840	
Net Operating Revenue	0.00	51,949	0.00	

Notes

- 3. Represents a 2.8% COLA across the board.
- 4. Health insurance costs increased significantly - over \$36,000

A Note From Brian:

I'm grateful for the Board's approval to release significant reserve funds to help with the many facility improvements and deferred maintenance that have been accomplished in the past year. These funds exist due to the generosity of our members; through bequests and donations, a successful Build the Bridge campaign that exceeded the campaign goal, and a sizable grant from the Columbus Foundation fund. The Building & Grounds section below and the Eco-Justice sections review many of these improvements. It is my hope that this investment in our physical plant will ease the financial burden of ongoing maintenance and repair, save energy, and improve the quality of services and programs.



Brian Hagemann
Director of Administration

Outside of my core responsibilities, I sat on a number of teams this year including the Safety Team, Building & Grounds, Solar Project Team. This would not be possible without some of the hardest working volunteers around! I would like to particularly thank Dave Richter, Tom Tichenor, Patricia Boughton, Christine & Billy Davidson, Greg Denby (Safety Team), Cara Seidt (legal/board), Ken Odiorne, Judy Vasquez, Deb & Tom Baillieul, Red Oak and SYC parent volunteers, and the many others who have contributed their time, funds and efforts. I also thank my colleagues on staff who are a true pleasure to collaborate with and work alongside.

Also, it is important to note that in the sections below you will read about how our church facility serves the community beyond our congregation as we also host the School for Young Children (an outreach project of First UU), Red Oak Community School, as well as various other religious groups and small group gatherings. We remain busy with rental activities for events, memorials and weddings. This year's rental income far exceeded our budget line,. Twice a year we serve as a voting location for the Franklin County Board of Elections. Our art gallery shows open us up to the larger fine arts community in Columbus. Our members support of First UU has impact in many ways. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions, concerns, ideas or want to find a place to pitch in with us.

Building & Grounds

Dave Richter

The 2026 fiscal year has been one of excitement and progress for the Building & Grounds team. The installation of solar panels on the church roof has been the largest and most significant of the projects. It is expected to supply more than half the electricity for the church and pay back its cost in about 20 years. It also supports the church's environmental mission by reducing our carbon footprint and setting an example of the path to clean energy.

Other projects this past fiscal year that reflected our commitment to environmental sustainability were conversion of all remaining fluorescent and incandescent lights in the building to LEDs and replacement of the gas stove and oven in the kitchen with electric ones. The kitchen also received a new dishwasher and refrigerators. The church continued to improve the interior environment by replacing the old frayed carpeting in the worship center with attractive new carpeting. Our T-Loop was also rewired for improved accessibility to hearing aid users.

Outdoors, major portions of the parking lot were repaired and the lot will soon be sealed and striped. The roof over a portion of Beach Hall, Rooms A&B, the kitchen and staff offices was replaced with additional insulation and a white surface. The church now has white roofing over its entire flat roof, thus reducing the heat load on the AC. Outdoor lighting was improved around the entrances and new LED lighting installed along the pathways. Money for these capital projects was about \$550,000 all of which came from the church's reserve funds, not its operating budget. Many thanks to our generous benefactors who have made this possible.

Plant Care

Diana Smith

One of the things that makes our building such a welcoming space are the many plants, trees, and greenery in the sanctuary and gallery. In our indoor living gardens the plants are maintained with a combination of science, experience and suggestions from other plant lovers. Each plant species has specific requirements for soil mixture, nutrients, light, temperature, water and pest/disease control, etc. Further, environmental conditions in the building can pose challenges for some species for maintaining happy, healthy plants. For this reason we ask that only the plant care team water and tend to the plants.

Some plants are purchased by the church but many are donated. A big thank you to all of you who have donated plants to the church! Coming soon to the Sanctuary, a Monstera Deliciosa (nickname Moni), also known as the Swiss Cheese Plant and a tall Fiddle Leaf Fig. If you have a mature plant(s) that you would like to donate please contact Diana Smith before bringing it to the church. We also would love to have others join our Plant Care team; reach out if you are interested.

www.firstuucolumbus.org



Art Installations*Deb Baillieul*

Art at First UU is working to be diverse in artists and in materials. We offer opportunities for local artists and groups to show their work in our Welcome Gallery and Sanctuary. We invite Red Oak School to feature students' work from the past year. This year we had exhibits by African American artists, and a Jewish artist from Sukkot Shalom. Each exhibit holds a reception, where members and friends of First UU can speak with our artists and learn about their practices and cultural influences. Artists featured this year included Red Oak School, Deb Weaver meditative drawing, members and friends in "Connections", Sharronah Laemelle with views of Israel, Lela Lint painted birds, and Nikki Nwosu fiber. This Fall our members and friends exhibit will be "Freedom!" Look for how we individually define and/or celebrate our freedoms.

Environmental Justice and Sustainability (AKA Eco-Justice)*Team Members: Tom Ballieul, Dana Reynolds, Tom Tichenor, Dave Richter, Diana Kadonaga and Susan Carr*

The Eco-justice team directly addresses two of the UU Principles – affirming and promoting Justice, Equity, and Compassion in human relations, and having deep respect for the interdependent web of all existence. In our efforts to become a recognized Green Sanctuary, we seek to live with a deep awareness of the global climate crisis and the deep environmental injustices of our time. In practice, these efforts include partnering with marginalized communities who are hit first and hardest by the current environmental crisis, supporting the Linden neighborhood through “Connecting Community Corridors for Pollinators, People, and the Planet”, and working with B.R.E.A.D. and the Columbus Department of Recreations and Parks on expanding the city’s green canopy. Partnering with these communities addresses both human and environmental needs. In addition, over the past year the church has sought to reduce its footprint on the world through a variety of “green” initiatives, including:

- completion of a two year solar energy project resulting in an expansion of our solar arrays to now provide over 50% of the church’s electrical use!
- replacement of remaining older sections of the church’s roof with white/reflective material for improved cooling during the summer;
- conversion to all-electric kitchen appliances, including an induction stove;
- replacement of all remaining older lighting with all LED fixtures;
- (with the Atheists Skeptics, and Humanists Group), Hosting a speaker from SWACO (Solid waste Authority of Central Ohio) on the need to better manage what gets sent to the landfill for disposal. In this regard, we continued composting all kitchen scraps, and expanded recycling through the Hefty Bags “Renew” program;
- publishing of “Eco-tips” in the Friday News to inform members about conservation and eco-justice opportunities featuring the city’s Conservation Program and other environmental and justice groups.

This summer we will once again ask church members to participate in the Lifecare Alliance’s fan donation program which provides new fans to individuals and families living in houses and apartments that lack air conditioning.

Safety Team

Greg Denby (Leader), Brian Hageman, Cara Seidt, Christine Davidson, Paula Egbert, Dave Richter, Ed Sargent

This past year, the Safety Team maintained monthly meetings to ensure our church observes best safety practices while remaining a welcoming community. During those meetings, we focused on policy and procedure updates, community training, and securing external funding for building safety improvements. Personnel changes included welcoming Ed Sargent while Paula Egbert and Christine Davidson concluded their service on the Team.

Operational milestones began with a building tour and procedure briefing for the Welcome Team and Ushers. Collaborative efforts also led to successful revisions of the Safety Policy, Safety Procedures, and the Incident Report form and workflows. Training initiatives were highlighted by a partnership with Impact Safety, which delivered a three-hour conflict de-escalation workshop. This session drew 24 participants, including staff, volunteers, and representatives from the School for Young Children, Red Oak Community School, and Kehilat Sukkot Shalom.

The remainder of the Team's efforts centered on a major funding push for the congregation. Following extensive research, the Team submitted a comprehensive Ohio Safety Grant application in May 2026. This proposal requested over \$100,000 to fund critical security infrastructure, specialized training, contracted security personnel, and upgraded communication systems. Final award notifications from the state are expected by June 30, 2026.

These proactive measures and strategic funding pursuits position the Safety Team to significantly enhance the security, preparedness, and overall well-being of our church community in the coming year.



Tech Team

Myra Hartmann

It's been another eventful year! Looking back, we bought new equipment thanks to the Raise the Paddle donation from last year, we got new tech team members, and had a large training event for our brand new sound board! We also have a new T-loop for our members with T-loop compatible hearing aids. Brian Hagemann, Billy Davidson, and I are working together to find the best new cabinet for our new board. Your Tech Team is always happy to serve our community.

Front Office

First UU, you continue to be a delight to work with – Thank you! Since I began working here 3 years ago, I have been managing various communications:

- Friday’s News, our weekly message that answers the question “What’s happening at First UU.” This year I was delighted to work with the Anti-Racist Allies and friends to add a new section to the newsletter called “On the Journey” where we communicate about our anti-racism efforts, events, and classes. I have enjoyed reading volunteer submissions of Black History heroes as we continue in our anti-racism journey.
- Board Bulletin, a communication from your Board of Trustees.
- Caring Connection, where we email each week’s Joys and Sorrows as well as one poem from the worship service.
- Phone system menus.
- Sign-up forms. **Please note:** Using these forms makes my workload significantly easier! I extend a HUGE “Thank you” to everyone who submits your requests for news announcements and event requests using the forms!

It is also my responsibility to maintain and organize the church calendar reservations for events, activities, meetings, and facilitate all rentals. In addition to all that, I’m tasked with knowing what everybody else’s job is - so if you ever have any questions, come to me and I can point you in the right direction. You can also check out the “contact directory” at the end of this report for a good idea.

Realm

Realm is our online private member database that is designed to help churches maintain a directory, manage volunteering, track giving, and communicate easily with each other. Members can use Realm to access their personal and giving information, to sign up for volunteering opportunities, and to connect with other members during the week. This year we have transitioned several volunteer teams to using the Scheduling system in Realm with great success. I also provided introductory trainings for group leaders and for pastoral team listeners to learn about the features and how to use it. If you have questions or need an invitation to realm, email realm@firstuucolumbus.org and we will be happy to help!



School for Young Children

Amy Rudawsky and Susan Roscigno
Co-Directors

Membership:

The SYC Committee had seven voting and three non-voting members this year consisting of church members, teachers, office staff and parents of the school.

Our SYC Staff this year consisted of 20 staff members: 19 part-time teachers (two of whom are also co-directors, one who is also an assistant director), and one part-time office manager. Three of our staff members have been here for 20+ years, an additional four have been here for 10+ years, and two of our current staff members are also alumni themselves.

Service to Church and Community

Our First UU community outreach program served 138 families with 147 children during this school year. This year, our annual Scholarship Auction provided \$16,300 to a total of 11 families who applied for financial aid for the 2025-26 school year. We are on track to provide \$15,800 in scholarships for the 2026-27 school year.

SYC offered a new service to families with our Child Development Consultant (also a part-time teacher). She offered office hours for caregivers as a resource for challenges and opportunities for support. Our consultant also sent out a monthly newsletter featuring relevant child development topics.

SYC completed a 4 year long project of our playground improvements. All three playgrounds received upgrades inclusive of a tree house deck, new playground hills, inground water pump features, new sand boxes, a shed addition and a new fence and gate with a locked entrance during school hours to increase safety measures.

We continue to build community through school-wide activities such as the SYC Family Orientation Night and New Family Orientation and also through our fall SYC Family Play Date and Spring Family Play Night, inviting current and prospective families. We leaned into the talents of our families and created an SYC band that put on a concert during our fall play date and then invited kids to participate in a drum circle. Attendance was great during all our events.

Caregivers were invited to four Parent Ed nights including topics such as discipline, resilience, and independence and sibling rivalry. In addition, SYC teachers hosted an informal conversation about kindergarten and invited community members to speak on different kindergarten programs in the area. 12 of our staff members traveled to Chicago for a staff development at the Kohl Children's Museum where we attended a workshop entitled Naturally Artistic: Using Nature to Inspire Art Explorations with Young Children.

Looking Ahead

We look forward to celebrating our playground improvement project with our SYC Families, SYC Alumni and our First UU Family on June 28th! We will celebrate our new playgrounds. Come join us for a provided lunch and Ice Cream bar and to explore our new playground. This summer we have 6 staff members who will attend a workshop at the Fred Rogers Institute in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.



Community Partners

Red Oak Community School

Cheryl Ryan, Director

Red Oak is a private school for elementary aged children that uses our Religious Exploration classrooms during the week. Their full annual report can be found at <https://www.redoakcommunityschool.org/2026-annual-report>

25/26 School Year in Review

- Celebrated their 10th school year!
- Ended the year with 79 students & 9 staff members
- 'Native Ohio History' was the school-wide, yearlong learning theme
- 'Branching Out' alumni programming continues to grow
- Gave out their first scholarships from their independently built scholarship fund
- Kids raised \$10,000 for their play area redesign project and secured an architect who is drawing a treehouse based on the kid's designs.
- 5th year partnering with Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)
- 7 graduates moving on to middle school!

Plans for 26/27 School Year

- Will begin the year with 84 students enrolled & 9 staff members
- 'Global Columbus' school-wide, yearlong theme
- Goal to grow their scholarship fund significantly this year!
- Partnership with CRIS will move into it's 6th year
- A local construction company will build the kid's treehouse!
- 18 students will graduate to middle school!

Kehilat Sukkat Shalom (KSS)

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus is proud to partner with Kehilat Sukkat Shalom (KSS). Their Kehilah is affiliated with the Jewish Reconstructionist Movement, because of their approach to Jewish values and practice and egalitarian prayer language. We are honored to host them in our church, providing a welcoming and safe place for their community to worship and learn. KSS is a dynamic and evolving community of individuals and families seeking spiritually meaningful and interactive approaches to learning, prayer, and acts of loving-kindness. Through events, worship, educational programming, social action projects, holiday celebrations, and sharing in joys and struggles, KSS members are strengthened in their individual and collective Jewish journeys. Our partnership underscores our shared values of inclusivity, support, and spiritual growth.

The Paulist Community

The First Unitarian Church of Columbus has continued to provide welcome and support to the Paulist Society in the years since their sudden removal from the Newman Center at OSU, allowing them to continue their important work. Paulist Associates meet monthly to discuss a spiritual program and explore their lives within the Paulist Fathers' charisms of evangelization, reconciliation, and interfaith. First UU is committed to fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration within the larger community: this partnership underscores our shared values of compassion, inclusivity, and mutual respect.

Contact Guide

In such an active community it can be difficult to know who should be contacted for any given thing. Below is a list of the primary staff contact for any of the sections included in this report. As always, any staff member will be happy to help you find the right person for your needs.

Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley, Lead Minister

Ministry, Pastoral Care
terasa@firstuucolumbus.org

Rev. Kelli McNeal, Minister of Congregational Life & Financial Manager

Membership, Stewardship, Small Groups
kelli@firstuucolumbus.org

Robin Lawson, Congregational Life Assistant

Sunday Morning Teams
robin@firstuucolumbus.org

Brian Hagemann, Director of Administration

Administration, Building and Grounds
brian@firstuucolumbus.org

Becca Morse, Office Manager

Announcements, Newsletter, General Inquiries
becca@firstuucolumbus.org

Myra Hartmann, Tech Coordinator

Sound or Video Equipment Needs, CUUPS
myra@firstuucolumbus.org

Paisha Thomas, Justice & Equity Student Minister

JAM, JEDI, Anti-Racist Allies
paisha@firstuucolumbus.org

Amber Scott, Director of Religious Exploration

Lifespan Religious Exploration
amber@firstuucolumbus.org

Niki Ducey, Religious Exploration Assistant

Religious Exploration
niki@firstuucolumbus.org

Brandon Moss, Director of Music and Chalice Choir

Music, Choirs
brandon@firstuucolumbus.org

Christine Davidson, Volunteer Staff Assistant

Alternative Worship Team
christine@firstuucolumbus.org

Susan Roscigno & Amy Rudawsky, School For Young Children Co-Directors

School For Young Children
director@syccolumbus.org



All of First UU's Staff wear many "hats" in our work here at First UU... sometimes literally!

Thank You for another Incredible Year! We all appreciate working with such a rich and vibrant community, and we look forward to continuing this journey together in the coming year.

-Your First UU Staff



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