



# Annual Report 2023

Presented at the 149th Annual Meeting  
Sun., Feb. 4, 2024



First Church  
Berkeley UCC



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## Church Officers

### Moderator

**JEANNE STRAUSS**



The theme for 2023 was “Strong roots, abundant blossoms,” a concept we lived into all year. Our Capital Campaign dug deep into our roots, as we reached out not only to current members but also to people and organizations that were involved with FCCB in the past, and many were glad to offer their support. The campaign really bloomed, raising \$1.8 million! We’re grateful for this resource to complete the new building as envisioned, with amenities that will allow us to serve the community in an abundance of ways for years to come.

We’ve witnessed the blossoming of our young adult community this year, as evidenced by clusters of young adults interacting each week during our After Party. Under the leadership of Pastor Hannah, they have had regular gatherings throughout the year, from dinners and game nights to Bible study and retreats. Likewise, our youth group has been meeting regularly on Sundays and at outside events, some of which include youth and staff from other UCC churches. Our younger children once again enjoy their own space on Sunday mornings, with our new Coordinator of Children’s Involvement, Bella Vavra. Abundant blossoms!

We’ve strengthened our roots by transitioning to Co-Senior Ministers, affirming the warm collegial relationship between Pastor Kelly and Pastor Molly. This arrangement provides greater stability and continuity for our church, as we agreed that either pastor would retain the position of Senior Minister when the other leaves her call. Further reinforcing this firm foundation is our new Director of Operations, August Laperche. And we’re rooting ourselves more deeply in the community with the blossoming of affordable housing plans.

In the wider church, the Black Wealth Builders Fund (which FCCB has supported) inspired the Black Wealth Builders Resolution, passed at the 2023 NCNC UCC Annual Gathering. It calls for churches to become BWB Congregations, an effort designed to help repair a small portion of the financial damage of racism and white supremacist policies.

It has been a privilege for me to serve as Moderator through these and other developments this year. Our ministry teams have been faithfully maintaining and enhancing their contributions to the life of the church, even with fewer people serving in each ministry than in the past. It has truly been a joy for me to work with all our lay leaders and staff, as each individual brings their whole self to this weird and wonderful journey we share.

## Moderator Elect

### STEVE SPIELMAN



While serving as Moderator Elect I have enjoyed learning more about how our church is governed. I am impressed by the care brought to large and small decisions that can impact the spiritual lives of our members. One item that took special consideration this year was the transition of Rev Molly's and Rev Kelly's roles into a copastoring relationship. I served on an ad hoc committee with our Jeanne Strauss, Moe Wright, Jennifer Nixon, Nick Kulkan, and our pastors. We put our enthusiasm aside and looked for potential pitfalls, both hypothetical and from the experiences of other co-pastors we met with. I believe the resulting co-pastoring resolution will serve the congregation well.

I attended, for the first time, the NCNC UCC Annual Gathering, in June. What an energetic and insightful group! As one of our delegates I voted in support of the Black Wealth Builders Resolution, which calls on all congregations in our conference to support African Americans looking to become homeowners in the face of the lingering damage from redlining and other obstacles.

In March, I enrolled in the "Healthy Congregations" workshop, held by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. The online seven hour workshop provided me with tools for healthy ways to handle conflict and anxiety in a church community. Other groups, like schools or businesses, encounter similar challenges. However, a church brings unique needs, both because of the closeness and the longevity of our personal relationships with each other. I recommend the Lombard workshops for others in leadership roles at First Church.



## Clerk

**LINDA SAWYER**



The clerk of the church is responsible for keeping the records of church business and taking minutes at Council and Congregational meetings. Highlights from 2023 are summarized here.

In February, Council approved the clergy housing allowance, which is provided in lieu of providing housing for the ministers. The allowance is approved annually. Council also approved a resolution to open two bank accounts to hold funds for building construction funds and the Capital Campaign funds.

In August, Council approved a motion to create a plan to have Molly Baskette and Kelly Colwell be co-pastors.

In December, the Congregation voted that Rev. Molly Baskette and Rev. Dr. Kelly Colwell serve as co-pastors of First Congregational Church of Berkeley UCC, sharing equally in the roles and responsibilities of Senior Minister. When either minister leaves her call at FCCB, the remaining minister shall retain the position of Senior Minister. At that time, the Minister and Church Council, led by Moderator, Moderator-Elect, Chair of Personnel, Chair of SF&A (Stewardship, Finance, and Administration), and Treasurer, will discern next steps. This plan will be harmonized with our church bylaws in the upcoming bylaws update.

In December, the Council approved a motion to recommend to the Congregation approval of the 2024 budget as developed by Stewardship, Finance and Administration and authorize the use of the Council Contingency fund as well as the Transitional Tasks Fund to balance the budget. If those sources are insufficient to provide a balanced budget, the Director of Operations and Treasurer are authorized to borrow from the Ministerial Housing Endowment up to \$160,000 on terms that are agreeable to the Investment Committee in order to balance the Operating Budget for 2024.

## Membership

### **Members Received 2023**

#### **Affirmation/**

#### **Reaffirmation**

Kera Binns

Nate Binns

Alex Cebula

Arin Dahl

Chris Ingersoll

Matthew Peacock

Qaisul Takihunang

Frances Tinney

Bailey Turner

Chuck Webb

Jennifer Williams

#### **Associate Member**

none

#### **Associate Member to Member**

none

#### **Confirmation/Adult**

#### **Baptism**

none

#### **Friend**

none

#### **Letter of Transfer**

Gillian Murphy-Stephans

Lydia Murphy-Stephans

#### **Reinstatement**

none

#### **Child Blessing**

none

#### **Members Lost in 2023**

#### **Associate Member or Friend (Moved Out of State or Dropped)**

Gene Buttrill

#### **Became Inactive**

Loi Almeron

Adrian Antonio

Nina Dodonova

Karen Taylor

#### **Joined Another Church**

Louise & Tim Specht

Kenneth Tyler

Diane Weible

Cathie Winks

#### **Requested Inactive Status**

none

#### **Transfer of Membership**

none

#### **Withdrew at Their Own Request**

Felicia Bellows

Michael Clulow

Dr. Pam Gumbs

Jesse Lofland

Rowan Peterson

Vanessa Reed

Andrea Trexler

#### **In Memoriam**

Bettie Neville Noyce (3/7/2023)

Jim McVay (5/1/2023)

John Wadman (5/18/2023)

Lewis Perry (5/23/2023)

Evelyn Sellers (10/12/2023)

Gretchen Parr (10/14/2023)

Rebecca (Becky) Allen Smith

(12/15/2023)

## Six-Year Membership Report

<b>GAINS</b>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
By Baptism/Confession	2	0	0	0	1	0
By Confirmation	7	0	0	6	0	0
By Affirmation/ Reaffirmation of Faith	9	10	16	0	6	11
By Letter of Transfer	9	1	1	3	8	2
By Reinstatement	2	2	1	1	3	0
Assoc. or Friend to Full Membership	1	0	0	0	1	0
Friend	0	0	3	2	3	0
Voted in by CF&I	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>
Associate Member Received	1	2	3	1	1	0
<b>Total Gains</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>LOSSES</b>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
By Death	-6	-4	-10	-5	-7	-7
By Letter of Transfer	-4	-3	-7	-3	-5	0
Joined Other Church/Withdrew at Own Request/Requested Inactive Status	-3	-6	-7	-6	-8	-12
Placed on Inactive	-9	-10	-18	-9	-5	-4
Membership Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0
Associate Member or Friend Dropped	0	-5	-1	-1	-1	-1
<b>Total Losses</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-43</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-26</b>	<b>-24</b>
Audit Correction	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Net Gain / Loss</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>-13</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-11</b>
<b>Membership at Year End</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>353</b>
<b>Average Weekly Attendance by Month</b>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	205	155	166	141	101	138
February	197	181	163	136	137	177
March	228	170	154	124	173	177
April	242	338	151	145	214	201
May	191	164	155	121*	138*	145
June	149	151	152	109*	127*	152
July	156	157	173	114*	134	126
August	144	147	160	120*	135*	133
September	174	153	161	94*	153	143
October	170	145	134	149	191*	154
November	184	162	133	147	140	147
December	361	340	224	231	226	234

2022 attendance for Jan. - Feb. 6 webcast only; Feb. 13 through year end, attendance includes both webcast & in-person participation. 2021 attendance for Jan.- Oct. 3 reflect Sunday morning "live" views on Facebook, YouTube & Vimeo. The numbers reflect single viewers only and don't account for multiple viewers per screen, so these numbers are lower than the actual number of viewers. Oct. 10 through December numbers reflect webcast viewers as well as in-person attendance. Some months (\*asterisk) include in-person "Lawn Church" worship attendance. 2023 attendance totals reflect both in-person and webcast views, which don't account for multiple viewers per screen.

# Ministries

## Adult Education Ministry

**MACK GRIFFITH, CHAIR**



Adult Education has a long history at First Church and the Adult Education Ministry is serving the congregation in upholding and organizing the continued learning in our church.

At the end of 2022, Willem VandeKamp decided to step down from his role as chair of the ministry and Mack Griffith was asked if he would consider stepping into the role. Mack agreed and began planning meeting agendas and leading the monthly meetings (conducted via Zoom) with the help of Willem and the other ministry members. Willem kindly agreed to take on the role of Church Council delegate since Mack was unable due to work commitments.

Learning hours continued in 2023 with the introduction of monthly themes which more or less helped to organize the many varied learning hours in an attempt to create more cohesive educational opportunities. In addition to learning hours, the ministry organized the first Adult Education Sunday worship service to reintroduce the congregation to the Adult Education Ministry and emphasize the importance of being a learning congregation. The service was intended to go alongside a Saturday Adult Education retreat, however, that was postponed due to organizer illness and will be rescheduled for early 2024.

Another significant addition to the Adult Education offerings is a Sunday morning progressive Christianity session where congregation members engage with materials (such as the Living the Questions series) and discuss various beliefs and issues within progressive Christianity. This series has been very successful and we look forward to continuing it in 2024.

The members of the ministry in 2023 were: Jim Alnas-Benson, Bob Stumpf, Mary Haake, and Willem VandeKamp. Kelly Colwell as staff liaison, and Mack Griffith as chair.

## Care, Fellowship, & Invitation Ministry

### SUSAN GREEF, CHAIR



The Ministry of Care, Fellowship, and Invitation (CF&I) provides ministry to promote a welcoming and inviting presence for all who cross the threshold of our church, and to provide acts of hospitality and care for the First Church community and beyond.

This year CF&I members staffed the two welcome tables each Sunday morning so they could greet all who came in, help people with name tags, and answer any questions.

The CF&I ministry was also responsible for coordinating the After Party Soup team, coordinating Meal Train, a tool that helps community members organize a way to provide meals for congregants in need of support, and for assisting staff at events by cutting many cakes and serving oodles of mac

and cheese.

We continued to hold our monthly meetings virtually where we supported one another and developed creative ways to continue to offer hospitality to our community.

The efforts, optimism, and support of our ministry members helped ease the anxiety of these extraordinary times, and have reinforced our dedication to hospitality, whatever form it takes! Thanks to members Kate Lucchese, Susan Webb, Chuck Webb, Carmen Baskette, Vanessa Reed, and staff members, Louise Halsey and Kathy Helliesen.

## Families, Children, & Youth Ministry

### **PAM VANDEKAMP, CHAIR**



The Families, Children & Youth (FamChY) Ministry at First Church Berkeley envisions our ministry to be devoted to building fellowship and connection among families in our congregation, to supporting families in the challenges of raising children today, and to nurturing the faith formation of children, youth and parents/guardians. Throughout the past year, we have engaged each month in a reflective process related to the actualization of this vision in service to our children, youth and families.

Within our reflective conversations, we began the year discussing and designing opportunities for our children to remain connected to the Sunday Service while experiencing fellowship and fun in their own unique Children's Space. At the same time, we recognized the importance of shared responsibility among ministers and congregation for our children and families. As part of this effort, we received approval from Church Council and SFA to create a new position which is titled the Coordinator of Children's Involvement. The primary role of this position is to be responsible for planning and providing opportunities for children attending Sunday Services to come to a dedicated space where they can play together, learn Bible stories, participate in crafts, activities and games and be active participants in the church community growing in relationship with each other, and with God. With the support and help of Rev. Hannah, we were able to extend an offer of employment to Bella Vavra in September 2023.

Volunteers in the Children's Space have completed the LiveScan process including fingerprinting and Department of Justice background checks to ensure a truly safe space for our children. Bella's presence is a blessing for our children, families and for FamChY as she attends our monthly meetings and shares in ongoing planning for children's activities and events. At the same time, the Amen Corner behind the pews in the sanctuary provides a small assortment of activities and items for anyone who might need a little support during the weekly worship service.

FamChY also provided support for a number of events for children, families and youth including

- Mardi Gras celebration with crafts and activities
- Supporting Youth Retreat at Orinda Community Church with lunch
- Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday
- Annual Summer Work Camp for our Youth
- Fall Festival activities and support
- Library Event to review current Children's Library offerings
- Trunk or Treat in conjunction with All Soul's Day
- Advent Craft Fair with hot cider and cookies
- All-Ages Christmas Eve Service in which children and adults dressed up and reenacted the story of the birth of Jesus

Our FamChY Team is exploring ways to adjust to a changing world where families don't attend church each week. Some of our reflections include the following which we will consider in the coming year.

- Adapt Youth Group to accommodate the current youth experience
- Adapt Children's Space to needs of the families attending, while growing in number and depth
- Focus on families looking for connection, food and community
- Provide Child care for family events

As our Ministry Team continues to prioritize building connection among families in our congregation we ask for your prayers and support.

FamChY Members:

Pam VandeKamp, Chair, Jim Marrone, Matt Reed, Katie Nnadi, Dorothy Block, Frances Tinney,  
Staff: Rev. Hannah Turner, Bella Vavra



## Justice & Service Ministry

### **MAUREEN PROCHASKA, CHAIR**



Throughout the year, the Justice and Service (J&S) Ministry responsibly and with joy discerns which organizations will be the recipient of the plate offering collected during worship. We learn about these excellent nonprofit organizations from First Church members, by reading their application and their website. On Sundays, J&S members are a welcoming presence when someone from the organization comes to speak about their work and mission at the Call to Offering. J&S is very grateful to our gracious and generous community for supporting these organizations.

With help from many people in the congregation, including the Worship and Spiritual Life (WSL) Ministry and the Stewardship, Finance and Administration Ministry (SFA), Justice and Service organized two successful Service as Worship Sundays; one in January and one in August. Three organizations were especially delighted to participate: SNAPkids, Interfaith Coalition for Justice in Our Jails (ICJJ) and the Richmond Tiny House Village, Farm and Garden community.

In April, First Church welcomed and provided respite for walkers participating in the CROP Hunger Walk. Thank you, Doris, Susan and Steve for providing water and snacks, and for being the face of First Church to the wider community. For several months, Craig Pratt researched and organized a Habitat for Humanity work day. The tiring, but inspiring event took place on Aug 26 with several FC members participating. Thank you, Craig, for all your work to make this an experience to remember for all involved.

Thank you, First Church community for supporting our unhoused neighbors and Berkeley/Albany residents experiencing food insecurity. In 2023 you have provided:

- 600 Bag Lunches for the Second Sunday Sandwiches effort led by Richard Brabham
- 785 Boxes of Cereal and 611 Jars of Peanut Butter for the Berkeley Food Pantry with the dedication of Birtukan Beyenssa and Mary Fujii who weekly collect and deliver the items
- 82 Pairs of Men's Pants and 30 Pairs of Shoes for Trinity Center in Walnut Creek
- 30 Christmas Eve Gift Bags filled with socks, hat, headlamp, fruit, tuna and chicken pouches, gift cards, \$10 bill and a Love Note...and much more.

Thank you, Paul Kealoha-Blake from Consider The Homeless! for helping to distribute the Bag Lunches each month and the Christmas Eve Gift Bags to the people you support who are currently unhoused.

Thank you to J&S Ministry members Winnie Boyle, Doris Lynch, Craig Pratt and Susan Shome. Your dedication is very much appreciated. Extra support provided by Steve Spielman and Rev Molly Baskette, our staff liaison. Thank you to both of you for sharing your expertise and wisdom.

## Justice & Service Account Summary

### **BENEVOLENCES in 2023**

### **Grants Given to Outside Organizations in 2023**

#### **Collection Plate 2023 and December, 2022**

<b><u>Month</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
Dec 4, 11, 18, 2022	Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS)	\$1,922
Dec 24 (Christmas, 2022)	Young Lives Matter Foundation	\$3,261
Dec 24 (Christmas, 2022)	East Bay Sanctuary Covenant	\$3,362
January 1, 8, 15, 22	SNAPkids	\$2,372
Jan 29, Feb 5, 12, 19	Ethiopian Village Schools Foundation	\$4,756
Feb 26 - Apr 2 (Lent)	Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans; Housing for people living with HIV/AIDS	\$2,407
April 9 (Easter)	Sogorea Te' Land Trust	\$2,704
April 16, 23, 30, May 7	Oakland Catholic Worker	\$2,961
May 14, 21, 28, June 4	StrideLabs	\$2,152
June 11, 18, 25, July 2	Loomis Basin UCC/The Landing Spot	\$3,757
July 9, 16, 23, 30	A Home Within	\$2,045
August 5, 13, 20, 27	What If? Foundation	\$2,782
Sept 3, 10, 17, 24	Women's Daytime Drop-in Center	\$2,266
October 1, 8, 15, 22	Justice in Motion	\$2,088
October 29	National Farm Worker Ministry	\$566
Nov 5, 12, 19, 26	Trinity Center	\$2,410
Dec 3, 10, 17, 31	Ethiopian Village Schools Foundation	\$4,204
Dec 24 (Christmas)	Consider The Homeless!	\$2,744
Dec 24 (Christmas)	Church World Service Northern California	\$2,696
	<b>Collection Plate Total</b>	<b>\$51,455</b>

## Mental Health & Disability Ministry Team

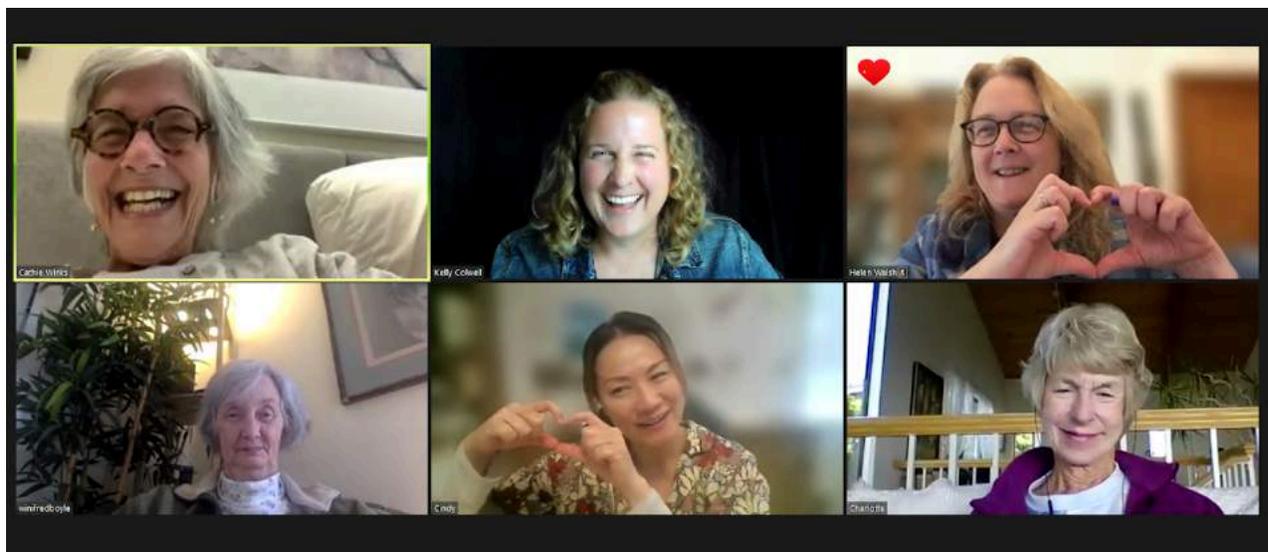
**REV. KELLY COLWELL, STAFF REPRESENTATIVE**

Led by a strong and collaborative leadership team comprised of Helen Walsh, Winnie Boyle, Charlotte Russell, Cindy Au, Kathy Keller, and Nancy DeNero, the Mental Health and Disability Ministry Team continues to thrive. The team continued to meet by Zoom each month to support the congregation's commitment to being a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) Congregation for Mental Health. Meetings served not only as space for planning and decision-making but also a space for deep sharing and mutual support among members.



Several important initiatives took place this year. The team brought several learning hours to the congregation this year, collaborated with the leaders offering Second Sunday Sandwiches to help get those meals to folks who need them, hosted a movie screening of *Crip Camp*, and re-started the in-person mental health

spiritual support group on the Third Sunday of the Month, facilitated by chaplain Cindy Au. The team continues to strengthen the library offerings and look for ways to raise the profile of mental health and disability inclusion in the congregation. The team looks forward to working in the coming year to support the congregation's ongoing learning and growth as a WISE congregation, and continuing to support the working group that is guiding the congregation towards gaining the *Accessible to All (A2A)* designation from the UCC Disability Ministries.



## Green Ministry Team

### MARTA BLACK, CHAIR



During 2023, the Green Team continued to present practical solutions to Climate Change and ways to be stewards of the earth. We listed Green Tips regularly in the *Carillon*, and hosted occasional Abundance Tables with church members sharing garden produce, seeds, and plants.

The Green Tips became a good venue to promote informational events about Climate Change and current happenings in the Bay Area. Examples include links to: COP 28, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; electric vehicle expos; youth in America filing lawsuits in their states for a livable future; the expansion of the Oakland International Airport and the impact

on the environment; and reducing plastic pollution.

Charles Taylor hosted a presentation about repealing the electricity tax provision for AB 205, which mandates the California Public Utilities Commission to establish a new, uncapped fee on all electricity users. This resulted in lobby meetings with legislators in late November and early December.



The Green Team has been a steady group of dedicated members for a number of years. We lost Tim and Louise Specht to a move in early 2023, and others have become more stretched in time availability.

Our most consistent members include: Marta Black, Barbara Grady, Jennifer Nixon, Annis Kukulian, Charles Taylor, Charlotte Russell, Andrew Young, Carol Chapman, and Emma Fujii (former chair). We hope to expand our membership to help determine goals for how best to support our planet. As new changes in our environment occur, there are both concerns for our children's future and questions about how to act. We will face new ways to reduce the worst effects, but also how to adapt. We will look at how to influence policy and how to effect good outcomes for the environment in the 2024 election. We also will continue to follow the excellent guidance of Interfaith, Power & Light.

## Prayer Team

### WILLEM VANDEKAMP, COORDINATOR



Since 2020 we have a Prayer Team at First Congregational Church Berkeley. This ministry started with four people, some others joined us, some left us, and then we were with four for most of 2022 and 2023. We meet online via Zoom, every other Monday night.

We receive the prayer requests and concerns, and prayers of thanksgiving, from the Sunday worship services, from our clergy and congregational care program manager, and via the email address [prayers@fccb.org](mailto:prayers@fccb.org). Based on this information we maintain a running prayer list, which gets updated once a week, and guides us in our bi-weekly team meetings and is used by the church staff in their weekly meetings. Some of these prayers are also shared with the congregation in The *Carillon* under "Tree of Life." The purpose of this is not only to share the joyful events and the various concerns with our church community, but also to involve you as a congregation in praying with and for each other.

The format of our meetings is: a check-in, a review of the list with new requests and updates, and a time of praying with one another as a team.

Since 2022 the Prayer Team is a team ministry within the Worship and Spiritual Life Ministry at First Church.

As a team we presented ourselves in a worship service in October, and several church members have joined us since then, so that we went from four to nine members. We are really thankful for this expansion of our ministry. We also encourage you to use the prayer request cards in the sanctuary pews and/or to share prayer requests online.

We are thankful to God who invites us as followers of Jesus to pray with and for one another.

The team: Helen Walsh, Jonelle Lucas, Larana McVay, Lee Beryl Heuermann, Kathleen Cooney, Marta Black, Martha Vognar, Qaisul Takihunang, Willem VandeKamp (coordinator).

## Stewardship, Finance, & Administration Ministry



### **NICK KUKULAN, CHAIR**

This year SFA faced the challenge of not having a business manager after Kit Dunbar's departure in December of 2022. A mix of church staff and members helped to keep our administrative work up to date. This meant that SFA did not have monthly financial reports to review. Sharlet Gilbert, our part-time bookkeeper and Moe Wright, our Treasurer did a great job of keeping up the accounts and paying the weekly invoices. Eventually we did have quarterly financials to review. Leah Walz moved to Seattle and remotely manages room use bookings. Nick and Molly manage relations with East Bay School for the Boys, and Nick keeps the accounting with them. August Laperche was welcomed in September as Director of Operations taking on many parts of the business manager responsibilities.

### **Stewardship**

The Build Gather Grow Campaign, initiated in February and concluded in May, was an amazing success. BGG raised funds for the new Community Building completion and enhancements, including a solar panel installation that will have a positive impact on our electrical expenses for years to come. Kudos to all the volunteers who made this happen and to all who committed funds.

SFA joined with church staff to initiate the annual stewardship campaign in September which builds up the sustained commitments for each year. Kelly and volunteers organized a two night telethon in October which helped boost the campaign.

### **Finance**

**Please note these figures are based on a projection of Full Year 2023 results. They are intended to give an overview of our sources of income and expenses.**

#### **Income Sources as % of total:**

- \*Sustained giving and all contributions - 48%
- \*Facilities Use Income – 43.5 %
- \*Endowment Income and Draw – 8.5%

#### **Expense Categories as % of total:**

- \*Personnel – 67.5%
- \*Ministry programs – 5%
- \*Administration – 4.5%
- \*Church Plant – 18%
- \*Budgeted Benevolences – 5%

## **Administration**

SFA looks after “Buildings and Grounds”. Amare Gebreyesus does a great job of taking care of regular maintenance and some project work. Outside vendors are used for janitorial, gardening, electrical and plumbing repairs.

SFA manages endowment funds designated for projects on the campus. This year there were a few small projects with minimal expenditures:

- To reduce PGE electric costs, SFA authorized replacement of Sanctuary and Hall of Entrance light bulbs to LED where possible. The benefit is reduced energy costs, and reduced labor costs for replacement of lights. So far 10 LED lights have been installed and tested in the Sanctuary main ceiling. We will continue to replace incandescent bulbs with LED.
- New exterior light fixtures for the Chapel and Sanctuary are on order and are expected soon.
- SFA continues to investigate replacement of the aged and over-capacity gas boiler that heats the Sanctuary.
- Tower water proofing is on the target list of concerns.

**SFA Members:** Diana Graham, Becky Smith, Nathan Hood, Nancy Campbell, Bob Helliesen, Nick Kulkan, Eunice Kwon, Christopher Batson

Investment Members: Nathan Hood, Bob Helliesen, Nick Kulkan

Endowment: Currently no members

Treasurer: Moe Wright

Staff: Molly Baskette, August Laperche

## Worship & Spiritual Life Ministry

**JULIE GREER, CHAIR**



The Worship & Spiritual Life Ministry (the Deacons) supports the spiritual life of the church. We enthusiastically pursue the vision statement's call to "grow in intimacy as the weird and wonderful Body of Christ" and "to provide a diversity of open but distinctly Christian, creative and liberating worship forms to nourish the spiritual lives of the current community and reach new seekers."

One way is through communion, which, because of the fall in Covid rates, has finally been moved wholly (holy!) indoors. Special thanks to Rev. Nancy DeNero for organizing our chancel communion celebrants, as well as to the celebrants and volunteer servers who generously give of their time and talent. Shout out to Stan Boghosian for keeping us well supplied with juice, bread and gluten-free crackers, and to Arin Dahl, who discovered (and

supplies) fabulous gluten-free bread for our monthly all-church communion.

One of our most solemn and sacred tasks is to serve at memorial services, of which there were sadly so many last year.

The Deacons have taken on a few new tasks this year: since the retirement of our long-time florist, the Deacons are supplying the weekly "welcome flowers" handed out by the children during every Sunday service. We also help set up and take down the Chancel every Sunday.

As always, in 2023 we conducted quarterly Operation Love Notes, helping folks to send cards to those of our community who could use some encouragement and connection. And we held an extra special happy Love Notes to celebrate Molly's 25th Anniversary of ordination!

We also continued a practice begun last year of pairing with the Justice & Service Ministry to offer Operation Love Notes as part of our Service-as-Worship Sundays. This included a special Operation Love Notes for folks to write notes for the Christmas Eve gift bags prepared by the Justice & Service Ministry for our unhoused neighbors. We were touched by how many First Church folks enthusiastically participated in all of these endeavors.

The Worship & Spiritual Life Ministry includes Julie Greer (chair), Stan Boghosian, Kerrie Hein, Carolyn Thiessen, Arin Dahl and Rev. Nancy DeNero. Rev. Kelly Colwell is our amazing staff liaison.

## Committees

### *Blue Fire Committee*

#### **LORENZO LLANILLO, COMMITTEE MEMBER**



The work of the Blue Fire Committee is highly visible to the casual visitor to the church. The building is fully materializing infant of our faces. Always the most exciting time during the building design process, construction allows us to see the form in space. Since we can see the structure being built, we often take for granted that church members remain involved in the process. In all construction projects the “Owner Entity” is a critical contributor of designing more refined details as well as the very important work of keeping the project on schedule and quality control.

The Blue Fire committee has used smaller subsets of the committee to address kitchen refinement, interior design, and signage in meetings with architects and contractors throughout 2023. These smaller subcommittees evaluated the finer points of aesthetics involved in the detailing of the interiors. The building sub-committee consisting Moe Wright and myself, Lorenzo Llanillo, with Patrick Sallee, our Project Supervisor, have been meeting with the General Contractor and Architect weekly to keep the project moving. These Owner/Architect/Contractor OAC meetings are common during the construction process to review progress, evaluate schedule, and clarify questions or concerns that may come up during the construction phase.

Editor’s Note: Construction continues with some weather delays, which have impacted the completion date. We’re now projected to move in fall 2024. Thanks to all who’ve committed to supporting the Capital Campaign. Because of your generosity, we will have a fully functioning community building.





## *Covenant & Discernment Committee*

### **KELLY COLWELL, STAFF REPRESENTATIVE**



The Covenant & Discernment Committee is under the oversight of the Ministry of Worship & Spiritual Life. Our primary task is to support and oversee members who are seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ (UCC).

We hope that our members-in-discernment participate in a wide variety of congregational experiences and are given a First Church member to be their mentor. We support them during their process of discernment as they seek ordination and their call to ministry.

Our current member-in-discernment is Emily Carduff, who is away working towards her M. Div. degree in Chicago.

First Church also forms and maintains three and four-way covenants with church members who are currently ordained ministers in the UCC and are called to positions other than parish ministries. The partners in a three-way covenant are the ordained person, the local church, and the Bay Association of the UCC. Four-way covenants include a calling body, usually the person's employer. Molly Baskette, Kelly Colwell, and Hannah Turner are in a three-way covenant with us. Those continuing in a four-way covenant are: Cindy Au, Chaplain with Sutter Care, and Larry Titus, Chaplain at John Muir Hospital.

We hope to meet with all members in covenant with First Church at least once a year and we are currently looking at ways to increase their involvement/connection with our community and ways we can be more supportive of them in their respective ministries. We are also looking to build relationships with retired ministers and those not in covenant with us who are members of our congregation.

The Discernment and Call committee is currently in the process of reformation, led by co-chairs Nicole Naffaa and Ken Iha.

## *Investment/Endowment Committee*

**NICK KUKULAN, CHAIR**



Thanks to the generous gifts of FCCB members over the years, we have endowment funds that provide support for our annual budget, maintenance of our church plant, and support of specific ministries to which endowment funds were specified. Gifts to the endowment are greatly appreciated and welcomed.

Our endowment investments continue with the United Church Funds. Our investment policy has not changed for the past years:

- To maintain an asset allocation of 65% in equity funds and 35% in bond funds. This provides diversification and stability through the ups and downs of markets
- To re-balance the funds to maintain this asset allocation on a monthly basis
- To invest in socially responsible principles established by the United Church Funds.

2023 investments are on track to show a positive improvement after the big decline in the portfolio of 17.31% in 2022. 2022 was a difficult year for most all investors in all major categories.

The General Endowment finished the year with a market value of \$3,440,848 an increase of \$405,403 from the 12/31/2022 value.

The Housing Endowment ended the year with a value of \$671,905 an increase of \$88,732 from 12/31/2022.

To put the Combined Endowment Funds values in perspective:

12/31/2023	\$4,112,753
12/31/2022	\$3,618,617
12/31/2021	\$4,376,244
12/31/2020	\$3,998,077
12/31/2019	\$3,387,080
12/31/2018	\$2,915,898

### **Legacy Circle**

First Church Berkeley's Legacy Circle includes individuals in our church community who have named First Church Berkeley in their planned giving through their wills or trusts, retirement funds or life insurance beneficiary designation, and/or other resources or assets to be distributed after their deaths. These important legacy gifts contribute to our church's long-term financial sustainability for generations to come. Planned gifts are added to First Church Berkeley's Endowment and are prudently invested by the church's Investment Committee. We

are extremely grateful for the faith and generosity of the Legacy Circle members. More information on how to become a member of the Legacy Circle may be found on the church's website.

**2022 Legacy Circle Members:** Molly and Peter Baskette; Richard Brabham, Mollyanne Brewer (Maremaa); Michael Casendino and Amy Hiestand; Bob and Kathy Helliesen; Robert and Bonnie Hester; Hope Hilton; Robin and David Kempster; Carmelle Knudsen; Lewis Perry; Phil Porter; Boyard and Ann Rowe; Rebecca Smith; Bruce and Susan Stangeland; Charles Taylor and Alice Clark; John and Helen Wadman; Morris and Rebecca Wright; Anonymous

Members of the committee for 2023: Nick Kukulian, Nathan Hood, Bob Helliesen and Moe Wright, Treasurer.

## *Committee of Involvement*

### **LEONARD ASH, CHAIR**



The Committee of Involvement (COI) has responsibility for nominating the elected officers of the Church, the at-large members of the Council of the Congregation, members of the Governing Boards of our six Ministries, the Long Range Planning Committee, the Investment Committee, and the Pastoral Search Committees.

The COI consists of the Church Clerk, the six immediate past chairpersons of Ministries and the immediate past Moderator, five at-large members, the Senior Minister, and such other members of the Church staff as the Senior Minister may designate.

Through prayer, discernment, and direct discussions with individuals in the Congregation, COI prepares a slate of nominees for consideration by the Congregation at the Annual Meeting in February. There are so many opportunities to serve in the spiritual work of First Church, and it has been our joy to help people find ways they can connect the gifts of their time and talents with the various ministries and committees.

Committee members who participated in 2023 include: Leonard Ash, Molly Baskette, Kelly Colwell, Louise Halsey, Kathy Helliesen, Hope Hilton, Nick Kulkan, Julia Madore, Linda Sawyer, Steve Spielman, and Jeanne Strauss.

## *Personnel Committee*

### **JENNIFER NIXON, CHAIR**

In 2023 the Personnel Committee transitioned mid-year from Kerrie Hein as chair to Jennifer Nixon. After FCCB had two individuals who did not work out in the 80%-time church Business Manager position, the position was reconfigured to be a full-time Director of Operations. We were delighted to welcome August Laperche in that position in September. We are also very happy have welcomed this fall Bella Vavra, as Coordinator of Children's Involvement.

We conducted a 360-degree review for Molly Baskette, lead minister. We also conducted or coordinated other staff reviews, in the absence of a permanent supervisor for them. We developed the Personnel budget for 2024, in coordination with August Laperche and helpful others.

Members of the Personnel Committee in 2023 were Kerrie Hein (through May 2023), Rev. Molly Baskette, Kara Korbelt-Chinula, Christine Gregg, and Jennifer Nixon



## Officers, Ministry, & Committee Members for 2024

OFFICERS	(terms end Jan. 2025)	(terms end Jan. 2026)	Council Rep.
<b>Moderator</b>	Steve Spielman Margaret		Steve Spielman Margaret
<b>Moderator Elect</b>	Kavanaugh-Lynch		Kavanaugh-Lynch
<b>Clerk</b>	Laura Monroe		Laura Monroe
<b>Treasurer</b>	Moe Wright		Moe Wright
<b>Council at Large</b> (no specified term)	Kathleen Cooney Ann Naffziger	Kathryn Stambaugh	

MINISTRIES	(terms end Jan. 2025)	(terms end Jan. 2026)	Council Rep.
<b>Care, Fellowship, &amp; Invitation (CFI), <i>Susan Webb, Chair</i></b>			
	Chuck Webb	Rick Ayer Jacqueline Dennis Kathy Keller Robin Kempster Susan Webb	Susan Webb
<b>Adult Education, <i>Mack Griffith, Chair</i></b>			
	Jim Alnas-Benson Mack Griffith Bob Stumpf	Mary Haake	Bob Stumpf
<b>Families, Children, &amp; Youth (FamChY), <i>Pam VandeKamp, Chair</i></b>			
	Jim Marrone Katie Nnadi Matt Reed Pam VandeKamp	Frances Tinney	Pam VandeKamp
<b>Justice &amp; Service, <i>Maureen Prochaska, Chair</i></b>			
	Doris Lynch Maureen Prochaska Susan Shome	Stan Boghosian Barbara Grady-Ayer Chuck Monroe	Maureen Prochaska
<b>Stewardship, Finance, &amp; Administration (SFA), <i>Nick Kukulan, Chair</i></b>			
	Chris Batson Bob Helliesen Eunice Kwon Nick Kukulan	Tim Culvahouse Diana Graham Robin Lucchese	Nick Kukulan

## Officers, Ministry, & Committee Members for 2024

<b>MINISTRIES</b>	(terms end Jan. 2025)	(terms end Jan. 2026)	<b>Council Rep.</b>
<b>Worship &amp; Spiritual Life (Deacons), <i>Julie Greer, Chair</i></b>			
	Arin Dahl	Kerrie Hein	Julie Greer
	Julie Greer	Linda Sawyer	
		Carolyn Thiessen	

<b>COMMITTEES*</b>	
<b>Long Range Planning, <i>Nat Binns, Chair</i></b>	<b>Investment <i>Nick Kukulan, Chair</i></b>
Megan Bates	Bob Helliesen
Nat Binns	Nathan Hood
Madeleine Canavese	Nick Kukulan
Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch	
Kara Korbelt-Chinula	
Steve Spielman	
Jeanne Strauss	
Sara Woods	

<b>DELEGATES</b> (no specified terms)	<b>COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL*</b>
Richard Brabham	<b>Endowment</b>
Terry Durham	Vacant
Hope Hilton	
Margaret Kavanaugh- Lynch	
Steve Spielman	
Jeanne Strauss	<b>Personnel</b>
	Christine Gregg
	Jennifer Nixon
	Kara Korbelt-Chinula

\*Terms may vary.

## Staff

### Co-Senior Minister

#### REV. MOLLY BASKETTE



What a big, beautiful year we have had, Beloved!

COVID, while less deadly, continues to shape public and private life. A vast majority of the congregation (but not all) have come back to church in person; some continue to worship online from nearby and even far away—we are their chosen church. New faces grace the pews, including a strong cohort of young adults, who tend to cluster together in the front near the pulpit. They are anchored to our church by our progressive theology, by the representation they see—two pastors under 40, and both queer!—and by the warmth and welcome they receive. They continue to befriend one another more deeply, especially at the Thursday night suppers that Rev. Hannah and Rev. Kelly host in

the Play Yard.

We came back together despite COVID's bullying, but remained a bit fragmented, intermittent and hesitant to commit to the basic volunteer functions that being a working church requires—a trend manifest in many faith communities.

Then a clarion call to come together in a more robust way came from the leadership of the church. As we further refined the budget for our new Community Building, we found we needed at least \$700,000 to complete basic construction, and a total of \$1.3m to have a real cooking kitchen, installed A/V, and the outdoor labyrinth we longed for.

With a gifted consultant and devoted leadership from longtime and newer members, we held the **Build. Gather. Grow.** Capital Campaign from Jan.-May 2023, culminating in a gala at the Brazilian Room in Tilden Park on a magical evening in late spring. The weather was as perfect as it gets in the East Bay. Scott Sparte, chair of the Blue Fire committee, donated all the wine. New friends and old gathered in finery, lively chatter echoing to the woods off the terrace. Once inside, the youth group capered a hilarious skit. Eighth-grader Rachel Canavese gave a sober, stirring testimony of her love for her new church, and pledged to give. I think a few of her words deserve to be written into the annals of First Congregational Church of Berkeley's history here:

Hello, church!  
I know as a 14-year-old,  
and not even an official member of this church,  
I may not be expected  
to contribute to the capital campaign.  
But I just feel like I'm ready to give back  
after everything this church has given me.

My family spent time  
in many Catholic churches throughout my life.

We would...go to church every Sunday.  
I would sit in those pews  
and I would listen  
and try –  
but generally fail  
to feel a strong connection to God.  
And then I would go throughout my life  
trying to make sure none of my peers found out that I was Catholic. (pause)  
But that all changed when we came to First Church.

We discovered it during the pandemic.  
But even as just glitching videos on a computer screen,  
this church was something I could connect to  
and regularly feel God's presence in.

Eventually, we were able to come in person  
and I discovered more and more wonderful things  
about our community every week,  
and I feel like I still am!  
But what I have discovered  
is that these people and this building  
is filled with amazing memories for me.

So I imagine our new building  
–a replacement for a building I never experienced–  
as a wonderful place full of life.  
I picture me and other youth  
running around playing Capture the Flag.  
I imagine us baking cookies and serving them.  
I imagine us talking  
and laughing  
and singing  
and praying.  
And I see it as a place  
for new people to come  
and maybe experience the same kind of transition I did.

I now look forward to Sundays.  
I sit in the pews and I take the sermons  
and the prayers into my heart  
and let them affect me.  
I am proud to be Christian.  
This church has made me a happier and better person.

The gala was all my favorite things about church, and then some: the end of it finding dozens of us on the dance floor, toddlers to octogenarians, every hue of human in a bacchanalia of joy, Earth, Wind & Fire.

We celebrated the total a few weeks later. We had busted through our Build and Gather goals, raising nearly \$1.8m in gifts toward the rebuilding effort.

It was deeply gratifying to know we not only had such deep capacity to give—we also had the heart and will to do it. The money is important because of the ministry it will allow us to do. But more important than the money is how the campaign re-galvanized us as a community. Person after person throughout the campaign shared vulnerable and powerful testimony of how First Church Berkeley UCC/FCCB has blessed them (us!), healed them (us!), helped them (us!) grow, and grow up, becoming what God intends us to be. What a privilege it is to share this place, this moment of time, and this tenderness.

The new building construction proceeds apace! As I write this, the handmade trusses have just gone up. On top of them are blessings submitted by members of the congregation, written in newish member Jennifer Hu's careful penmanship, to silently land on all those who will walk through the doors. Kara Korbelt-Chinula and I have been helped by our architects and First Church friend Liza Besso on the interior design details including a very subtle rainbow theme throughout the office suite and bathrooms, and murals going up on some interior walls. Treasurer/Blue Fire Team member/unofficial construction supervisor and all around mensch Moe Wright thinks we will be able to move in between summer and fall 2024!

Our affordable housing team has been working on moving forward with the housing planned for the opposite (northwest) corner of our campus. In early December, EBALDC along with the architects Yes Duffy and David Baker Associates shared with us some possibilities for how the project might be configured (up to 70 families, housing more than 4X the people we initially imagined!), as well as a rough timeline, funding considerations and other details. It's been nearly four years since we took the vote in which 93% of the congregation affirmed the choice to move forward with building housing—these projects always take a long time to put together, and COVID slowed it down further—but now it feels like we are truly on our way. In the first quarter of 2024 we will finalize a joint development agreement with EBALDC that will determine how much they will pay us for a ground lease on the land, and make way for them to move ahead with putting together funding. We can assist and streamline the process by writing letters to city, county, state and federal instrumentalities. Understanding that housing will take up some of our parking lot (we will lose a net eight more spaces than we currently have given that half our parking lot is taken up by construction on the community building), we will make a new parking plan at the right time to alleviate impact on elders, mobility challenged folks, young families and other impacted people.

Our financial situation will likely be challenging for the next couple of years, as the cost of doing ministry in the Bay Area continues to increase exponentially (insurance one driving factor), with fewer people of significant means able to support the church at high levels. Every gift helps, and we are grateful for the many people across the lifecycle who continue to give generously according to their means. We hope that when the capital campaign giving period has ended annual giving might increase, and we will have money flowing in from the affordable housing joint development agreement that will also ease our budgeting process. However our financial future develops, we are well-resourced and in a strong position to face it.

At the same meeting that brought us up to speed on the affordable housing project, we took a historic step, elevating Rev. Kelly Colwell by an overwhelming vote to be co-senior minister with me! It's the first time in our history we have had this shared model of leadership, one that I believe is the wave of the future for multi-staff church. Kelly's skill and maturity have been manifestly obvious since she joined the staff; she and I have been functioning as full collaborators and colleagues for a long time. It was time to make the inner reality an outer reality! This shift will also undoubtedly offer more stability and sustainability for the church if one pastor takes a sabbatical, goes on medical or parental leave, or retires/seeks a new call. It also means no one person is the savior or the scapegoat in the church system, on whom all the pressure to please or revitalize rests. It demonstrates a commitment to humble, shared discipleship rather than hierarchical leadership, and a new way to think who is responsible for the vision of the church (short answer: all of us!).

We have had some happy new staff transitions this past year, with August Laperche joining our staff team as our incredibly capable Director of Operations, and the warm and loving Bella Vavra coming aboard to work with our children on Sunday mornings. Robin Kempster retired as our generous and wise Parish Nurse after many years of service, but continues as a member of the pastoral care team and volunteer staff, ready to advise people in difficult medical situations and those facing the challenges of aging and frailty. The staff is in a good place: it feels like we are the right size, and have the right people to do the work we are called to do! I'm enormously blessed and grateful to work with them all: Rev. Kelly and Rev. Hannah, Louise Halsey, August, Bella, Amare Gebreyesus, Derek Tam (currently finishing a restful sabbatical), Liz Forsyth, Amar Khalsa, Leah Walz, Sharlet Gilbert and Kathy So.

I have been blessed by your support and affirmation in getting training this year for a graduate certificate in psychedelic-assisted therapy through the California Institute for Integral Studies. The emergence of psychedelics (including psilocybin, LSD, ketamine and MDMA) to heal a variety of conditions including depression, anxiety, fear of dying amongst cancer patients, addiction, OCD and PTSD is being well-documented by dozens of FDA-approved studies. MDMA and psilocybin are likely to become medically legal in 2024. Both university settings like CIIS and a number of seminaries have begun offering training to therapists, doctors, nurses and clergy/chaplains as skilled facilitators for these emerging therapies. When I finish the program and as above-ground opportunities become available, I look forward to understanding how I might fit into the healing landscape, as well as provide "healthy normals" opportunities to work with these molecules for spiritual growth and greater intimacy with God.

I've spent time this year gathering with faith colleagues in Berkeley through the nascent Berkeley All Faiths group. Kelly and I hosted our first in-person gathering since I began gathering us two years ago. Serendipitously, the luncheon held in our hall of entrance took place a scant ten days after the war in Gaza began, allowing us to pray for peace and support the women rabbis in our midst.

Late in 2023 we began preparing for our first big offsite church trip since my arrival: an antiracism pilgrimage to Montgomery and Selma, AL this February. Led by Brittany Walker Pettigrew, 29 of us will travel together to visit sites of the early civil rights movement as well as experience the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and Memorial. We have met biweekly

(along with several church members who aren't coming on the trip but who want to do the reading nonetheless!) to discuss racism in its many insidious forms, learn strategies and skills to help us be better allies and have brave conversations about race (and other forms of discrimination and othering), and grow in intimacy. I hope this will be the first of many more such intensive experiences. We continue to offer a wide variety of weekend and daylong retreats to help people grow in spirit and in relationships! Including the All-Church Retreat, a silent retreat, young adult retreats, youth retreats, parenting retreats and more.

Meanwhile, the everyday blessing and busy-ness of our church continues. Making PB&J for our second Sunday sandwiches for unhoused neighbors, starting a group for companions of those with mental health struggles, another group for the spirituality of aging, worship, committee meetings, new member classes, Bible studies and a very well-attended, lay-led longer series of progressive theology. We've welcomed babies and buried beloveds, including lions like Lewis Perry (a venerable 100.5!) and Becky Smith (too young, at age 68).

In addition to our in-house preachers, we have had a wide variety of voices in our pulpit and on our chancel this past year: author and playwright R. Eric Thomas, Berkeley author Peggy Orenstein, polyamorous preacher Ciaran Osborn, Phiwa Langeni from the Stillspeaking Writers Group, Greg Tre Harris from City of Refuge and more. Representation matters, and we continue to enjoy a wide variety of voices in our pulpit.

In 2024, we will move into our new building, look back on 150 years since our first worship service in June 1874, and look ahead to the future. We will examine our five-year vision passed in September 2019 (what a different world it was!) and ask ourselves what is still to be mined from it, and where God is leading us next. We will vote in what is likely to be the most consequential election of our lifetimes, and perhaps the life of our still-young nation. We will keep building, keep gathering, keep growing.

Christlove,  
Molly



## Co-Senior Minister

### **REV. DR. KELLY COLWELL**

This past year has been a real achievement for our congregation! In January, after Fall 2022's optimistic pilot study, we began our Capital Campaign in earnest, led by a crop of tremendous leaders and a wonderfully organized outside consultant. I prayed that the campaign would bring us not just the funds to build the community building we need, but a new sense of togetherness, teamwork, and confidence for a new season of church life. And church? God provided exactly that! From the beautiful launch parties in members' homes to the moving Advance Commitments Reception, at which a stream of faithful folks popped up one after another to offer their own heartfelt testimonies. I don't think there was a dry eye in that lovely room at the Berkeley City Club when we watched our beloved Becky Smith give her testimony via video.



Molly has already described the Gala--but I'll mention the celebration and dedication Sunday, when we shot confetti into the air and announced that exciting total during the first Sunday of Pride month. It was a highlight of my ministry career so far to preach a sermon on Real Queer Love that day, in a crowd that included our "regular" congregation and also a choir of middle school boys (and their parents)! What better testimony to what kind of church they'd visited, I thought. We celebrate, we're unapologetic about who we are, we're learning, we're growing.

This year was our third Pride Month with all queer preaching in June, and we welcomed two guests who brought us stories of the real queer love in their own lives, including a beautiful sermon and workshop from Ciaran Osborn about polyamory. I was so proud of our congregation for receiving and delighting in the love that Ciaran told us about. And the absolute joy of our own nonbinary kids and teens introducing themselves to Phiwa Langeni: "I'm a 'they' too!" "That's so cool!"

I continued to delight this year in all the ways we find to bless each other and our neighbors, from those Second Sunday Sandwiches to the blessing of pets, backpacks, babies, new members, folks moving away, and folks who've passed away. I've been delighted to join my twin vocations of ministry and teaching as we launched the 9 am Sundays Progressive Theology discussion series. And I was absolutely overjoyed, in a quiet way, to co-lead our first Silent Retreat in November with the wonderful facilitation of Ann Naffziger. With 20 participants up at St. Dorothy's Rest, we deepened our spirituality, reflected on our journeys, and soaked in the natural beauty and quiet. I can't wait to do it again next year. For me, it's bringing all my spiritual and religious pieces together.

Much of my focus this past year went towards administration and institutional development, as we spent ten months without anyone in the business management office. The hiring process for that role took some time but ultimately led us to a clearer and more defined role we renamed Director of Operations, and once we found that clarity, the perfect person found their

way to us without too much more trouble. We welcomed August Laperche (they/them) into the role in September and have been in awe of the improvements in function and organization they've brought us ever since. I'm so grateful for the warm, functional staff team we've built, and can't wait to see what we can accomplish now that we're fully covered!

I continue to provide staff support to the Ministries of Adult Education, Worship and Spiritual Life, and Mental Health and Disability, along with the newly formed Accessible to All working group.

In the 20% of my working life that isn't church, I continue to teach and work on academic pursuits. This year I've taught at both Pacific School of Religion and Church Divinity School of the Pacific, with courses ranging from field education to preaching to ritual design. I'm in good company in this very educated and very thoughtful congregation! May the coming year bring us new opportunities, new experiences, and new faces to welcome!



## Minister for Youth, Young Adults & Emerging Ministries

**REV. HANNAH TURNER**



Looking back at the last year and all the wonderful things I had the honor of planning, leading, and participating in has made me think - God is so good! It is an incredible blessing that I get to be part of and help lead this community.

We have some wonderful middle and high school students whom you might not see on a regular Sunday morning but are certainly participating in our events like our Confirmation Retreat, Advent Retreat and Social Justice Weekend that we partnered with other Bay Area UCC churches with. We planned time to have fun (obviously) along with meaningful and enriching content lessons. Some of our high school youth also attended work camp last summer and joined our friends at Groundswell Surf Therapy helping them at their main base in tearing down and rebuilding a new shed. We continue to meet regularly on Sunday after Worship for lessons and games. We have quite a number of Seniors graduating this summer so be on the lookout for opportunities to encourage them and maybe ask them about anything BUT college \*wink\*.

If you have been noticing more and more young adult faces on Sundays lately, you are not seeing things! We certainly have had a jump in young adult presence here at FCCB. I think this is largely due to Rev. Kelly's idea of Second Thursday Suppers that I have had the honor of running. Having something consistent like that has really helped cultivate community among the young adults. We also have had 2 retreats specifically for our YA group along with monthly fun activities that are often planned by someone in the group! We finished our Genesis Bible Study and even though this is not a Young Adult's only event, most of the folks in that age group are who attended those meetings. We will begin another study on Exodus this year.

We have continued the tradition of serving cookies and popsicles at the Cal Campus during their finals weeks and have added Charlie (my golden retriever) to the tradition by being available for dog therapy and snuggles. This year begins my work with Lorenzo Illiano, and Eunice Kwon with The Vinery - a program designed for churches near college campuses, training their congregation leaders to be a congregation prepared and welcoming to college students. I am hopeful of where this program will lead and grow us in this area. I also hope to be part of more interfaith conversations on the Cal Berkeley campus (this is already in the works). Additionally, I intend to hold at least one listening circle of sorts for Ex-Evangelicals with the intention of offering them space to process and explore other methods of spirituality.

May God's blessing be all around us and within us as we go forward together in ministry. Thank you for your continued support to this community and may we continue to grow together in justice, love and mercy.



## Director of Music

### **DEREK TAM**



2023 was another rich year for the music program at First Church!

First of all, I want to express my appreciation to this community for the gift of renewal and contemplation during my three-month sabbatical. I am especially grateful for the tireless efforts of my dear colleagues and friends, organist Elizabeth Forsyth and multi-instrumentalist Amar Khalsa. For the past decade, I have enjoyed collaborating with them week in and week out, and I am especially beholden to them for their leadership during my absence.

I am also eminently thankful for our Sanctuary Choir. We are lucky to have so many talented and joyful singers giving their voices and spirits so fully to our worship experience. I also want to take some time to thank our other standing music groups, including our bell choir (led by Jim Coates), Uke-atastrophe (led by Kate Lucchese), and Songs of the Soul (led by Linda Crebbin-Coates).

We are also very fortunate to have so many amazing musical guests join us in worship. From the voices of youth—the San Francisco Girls Chorus, Piedmont-East Bay Children’s Choir, and Pacific Boychoir Academy—to the gospel stylings of Benja Mertz and the improvisational flourishes of David Worm and his friends (both in Sunday worship and now monthly through CircleSing), we are treated to an embarrassment of riches.

Finally, I want to lift up our amazing concert series, Resonance, as well as the many outside musical groups that call us home as well.

I look forward to a musically rich 2024, as we celebrate our church's 150th anniversary and the inauguration of our new building!

## Coordinator of Children's Involvement

### **BELLA VAVRA**



In 2023 I had the wonderful opportunity to join FCCB as the Children's Coordinator.

In the nearly half a year since I started this role, I have had the privilege of leading the creation of the FCCB Children's Space. The Children's Space has been a dedicated place for children at FCCB to engage with each other, play, build community, and learn important life lessons in a safe and engaging environment.

Often in line with the underlying message of the children's time, each Sunday in the Children's Space has been based around a general theme, which has included gratitude, loving oneself, loving others, and God's amazing earth and animals, among others. These have been explored through activities such as crafts, obstacle courses, and even yoga storytime.

We structured this space with the intention of finding a balance between tending to the unique needs of families and children, and maintaining the intergenerational joy and fellowship that comes from having the children be involved in the larger congregation. With this in mind, the children continue to join the full congregation for the second half of each service, as well as the first Sunday of each month, where they have played important roles in delivering the offering, passing out flowers to the congregation, and participating in a time of spiritual learning and discussion through the children's time.

It took the foundation of a safe, joyful, and inclusive community to build a space full of these things for the children of our church, and I am so immensely thankful for the wonderful individuals who have stepped up to represent that.

From my fellow Family, Children and Youth Ministry members who have supported me in conceptualizing this space and bringing it to fruition, to the co-leaders and ushers who make it happen every week, to the parents who have filled our spiritual buckets with their gratitude and support as the space has continued to evolve and grow, none of this would have been possible without their participation and encouragement. I am also so grateful for those who have come before me in FCCB children's ministry, many of whom are still offering their time and experience now. Going forward, we are looking for more people to join us in running the Children's Space every 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Sunday morning.

As we go into 2024, I look forward to many more Sunday's in the FCCB Children's Space, and I look forward to seeing how our larger community will grow in love and fellowship as we continue to prioritize the intentional inclusion and uplifting of the children and families in our community.



## Director of Operations

### AUGUST LAPERCHE



In September at the All-Church Retreat, I officially joined the FCCB family! After about four years of living in Texas, my spouse Evan and I are overjoyed to be back in the Bay Area. It is a joy to get to serve as this community's new Director of Operations.

I am so grateful for the many folks who were involved in creating and defining this role before I ever got here. The position description and the values, mission, and *vibes* of the FCCB community instantly drew me in when I learned about this role in the summertime.

You may be wondering, though...*what does a Director of Operations of a church do?* That's such a great question! Here are a few examples:

- I work closely with the Stewardship, Finance & Administration (SF&A) committee to offer stewardship updates about year to date giving actuals, and any stewardship mailings that are on the horizon.
- Moe Wright (our treasurer) and I do the weekly cash and check deposits together.
- Our bookkeeper, Sharlet Gilbert, and I collaborate to track expenses and income on a regular basis.
- I use Realm to track data about giving, and help folks with updating their commitments when needed.
- Monthly, I attend the Ministry Council meetings and give any relevant updates about operations and logistics.
- Leah Walz (our event manager) and I meet on a regular basis to check-in about facilities. We are working together on some adaptations to and clarification of policies to help the groups who rent our space have an even smoother event process.
- East Bay School for Boys' (EBSB) new Head of School, Robert Smith, and I are in communication about facilities use, maintenance, and general dynamics of the relationship between FCCB and EBSB.
- Weekly, I check in with Amare Gebreyesus about the goings-on of the church. I'm glad to get to support him in the work that he does, and lean on his expertise about the building and the overall happenings at FCCB.

In addition to these tasks and many more, I also have enjoyed engaging in the life of FCCB: participating in Young Adult events and attending worship a few times a month. You may have seen my spouse, Evan, and I walking around Trunk or Treat as a "charcuterie" (wine and cheese) duo! I also love working closely with Louise and Rev. Kelly around the office. (I even learned how to use the folding machine!). Thank you all for how warmly you have received me. It has been a wonderful few months so far, and I look forward to what the new year and the future hold!

## Congregational Care Program Manager

LOUISE HALSEY



We started 2023 in a full-on sprint with the departure of Business Manager Kit Dunbar and the start of our **Build. Gather. Grow** Capital Campaign. There was much to do and the companionship, camaraderie, and dedication of our staff and many devoted volunteers supplied the energy, momentum, urgency, and excitement to move gracefully forward.

As the Capital Campaign took on a life of its own, it was refreshing to meet in-person with members of the leadership team and work towards a shared goal. I felt energized by being with other bodies in the same physical space (albeit wearing a mask) and inspired by the commitment of time, energy, and talents of each member of the team! The small group Launch Parties (informational sessions about the campaign), many of which met in church members' homes, were yet another opportunity for our community to gather together in person, and further strengthened a sense of shared purpose. I had the opportunity to work closely with Jennifer Nixon, who as our promotions person, produced multiple newsletters and other communications about the status of the campaign. I'm grateful for her partnership as well as the support of the volunteers (Kathy Helliesen, Ann Jensen, Jonell Lucas, Vanessa Reed, Jack Zimmermann) who made it possible to get these communications in the mail! And, soon, fall 2024, we'll be moving our administrative offices over to the new building - alleluia! Thanks be to God and all the efforts of those in our community and beyond.

A big Thank You goes out to First Church Librarian Emerita Carole Wells-Desin, who spent countless hours this past spring and summer pouring over nearly 50 boxes of library books recovered from the church fire. The books had been stored in the church basement since 2016 and Carole agreed to sort through and decide which books to keep for our new library and which to give away. You may have noticed a gray cart overflowing with some of these books in the Hall of Entrance. I hope you were able to find some titles of interest or some to add to a neighborhood Little Free Library. The Friends of the Berkeley Public Library accepted all the books we were unable to give away.

Another highlight of 2023 for me was participating again in our First Church's Bell Choir, which after a nearly three-year hiatus, began playing together again on Tues. evenings in the Pillar Room. Thanks to my partner Jim Coates for his skilled and fun leadership and to all the bell ringers (new and returning) who make these weekly gathers a blast.

After more than 20 years of providing beautiful flower arrangements for our Sunday morning worship, palms for Palm Sunday, Easter lilies, Christmas poinsettias, and countless other arrangements for memorial services and other special services, Sumito Tsuizaki retired and closed his North Berkeley flower shop. We honored him during worship in early October for his artistry and for the countless times he'd carried heavy, water-filled vases onto the Chancel.

Sumito told me later he was moved to be honored and that it was his first time at a Christian worship service.

The September arrival of our new Director of Operations August Leparche was yet another significant milestone in 2023. Having them join our staff has been a joy and relief to me and others on staff. We're so glad August is here and I look forward to continued partnership in 2024.

It's an honor and privilege to serve this community, my beloved church family, and to work collaboratively and creatively with an amazingly gifted and caring clergy and staff. I look forward as ever with hope and love as we step into 2024 together.



Capital Campaign News  
First Congregational Church of Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Issue 1  
February 2023

### Upcoming Campaign Events

Launch Parties  
March 2–March 25

Gathering in the Spirit  
Event  
March 30

Learning Hour:  
Rev. Dr. Sheryl  
Johnson  
Sunday, April 23

### Our Campaign Begins!

In our worship service on Sunday, January 22nd, we officially began our Capital Campaign entitled **Build. Gather. Grow.** Over the coming months, we will journey together through our campaign in participation and giving.



**Build. Gather. Grow** will raise the additional funds necessary for us to rebuild our primary program facility which will house church offices, a large assembly area opening onto an outdoor worship and gathering space, a kitchen, classrooms/youth/meeting space—all light, bright, energy-efficient, and fully accessible. Imagine the incredible ways having this renewed space will serve the needs of our community!

But this campaign is about more than just finances—it's an opportunity for us to grow into the heart and the love of God as we



## New Member Coordinator

### **KATHY HELLIESEN (VOLUNTEER)**



We joyfully welcomed 13 New Members into the life of First Church Berkeley in 2023. A heartfelt welcome to Jennifer, Chris, Gillian, Lydia, Arin, Chuck, Matthew, Kera, Nat, Alex, Frances, Qaisul, and Bailey.. Our newest members are already serving on ministries, helping with our children’s program, working on special projects, offering hospitality, and serving on the Prayer team. Our community is enriched by their presence.

Our Discover First Church classes are led by Rev. Molly and Rev. Kelly. After getting to know each other over Cheeseboard pizza, inquirers learn about our denomination, the UCC, what it means to be a member, the sacraments we observe and have plenty of time for questions. Those deciding to become members meet the following Saturday for crepe making and sharing spiritual stories. The rich sharing is a gift to all who attend. Joining follows the next morning at our 10:00 AM worship service.

Many thanks to Revs. Molly and Kelly for leading the classes, and to Louise Halsey for her support.



**OUR NEWEST MEMBERS**  
Jan. 29, 2023 Joining Class

**YOUR CHURCH FAMILY WELCOMES YOU!** ❤️

First Church Berkeley UCC

# OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Oct. 15, 2023 Joining Class



**YOUR CHURCH  
FAMILY  
WELCOMES  
YOU!**



## Parish Associate

### **ROBIN KEMPSTER (VOLUNTEER)**



After concluding my activities as Parish Nurse this year, I have been honored to continue serving First Church Berkeley as a Parish Associate. In this role, I attend staff meetings, participate in the Pastoral Care Team, coordinate Meal Train, and support other programs as needed. I look forward to continuing as a Parish Associate in the coming year.



## Chat Pastor

### **GEOFFREY GASKINS (VOLUNTEER)**



The pandemic's impact on already dwindling church rolls has been more than a little concerning. The UCC-affiliated Center for Analytics, Research and Data published a study last April estimating that, in the decade ending 2020, somewhere between 75 and 150 congregations closed *each week*. The Center projects that those numbers will double or triple throwing the pandemic into the equation.

Lockdown or no lockdown, remote worship is here to stay! It'll be an important platform for Progressive Christian prophets, like ours, to speak in the Spirit of Jesus to a world that appears to have lost its mind, and its heart.

I could go on, and you've likely got a story to tell. (The Baptist church close to my old place in Oakland is now luxury condos.) But y'know what? The opportunities for welcome and outreach for Progressive Christian congregations has never been better! The outlook for our "new normal" looks great!

When the pandemic hit, churches all over the country — including First Church — were scrambling to keep people connected and worshipping communities worshipping. Churches, particular among the mainline, that hadn't done anything like live-streaming before were struggling to get going.

When I first started monitoring our worship chat rooms, we were sputtering along, too. But here's the thing. There's a magic — maybe better, a spirit — to how things unfold at First Church. I've sensed that since I was an intern here. As we had to close the doors during the pandemic, our YouTube, Facebook, and Vimeo chat rooms filled up. And people engaged with each other. We did community together. And people stayed when the video froze or the audio dropped. Our people express again and again how grateful we are to have this opportunity to stay connected, to pray with the body ...

... and to join the body. I host our chat rooms on Sundays. It has been exciting for me to participate in — and witness — our livestream program reaching people across the country and beyond. If y'Google "progressive christianity" you're gonna' find First Church in Berkeley. And if y'find First Church you're gonna' find our worship livestream. And if y'find our worship livestream, you're gonna' find out who we are and what we do. And if y'find out who we are and what we do, you're gonna' want to join in.

Don't take my word for it. Pay attention to who's walking through the door ... or who's joining First Church online programs. Online worship is here to stay ... and that's a good thing. It's a new opportunity that we are starting to wrap our heads around.

Rev. Colwell reminded me that "*online* is our new front door." It makes it possible to connect with the community when you're away. And our tech people are getting better and better at making that connection more and more meaningful and engaging. And our people ... need I say more?

I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of First Church’s worship livestream. It’s evolved far beyond being a stop-gap measure through the pandemic and into a bright expression of Progressive Christianity. Blessings on all our holy conversations.

## STATS

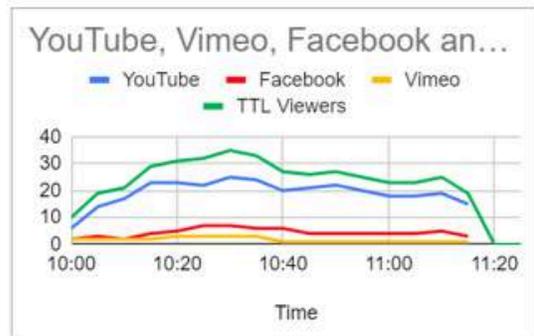
### 2023 Worship Chat Stats

AM

9/10/2023

Time	YouTube	Facebook	Vimeo	TTL Viewers
10:00	6	2	2	10
10:05	14	3	2	19
10:10	17	2	2	21
10:15	23	4	2	29
10:20	23	5	3	31
10:25	22	7	3	32
10:30	25	7	3	35
10:35	24	6	3	33
10:40	20	6	1	27
10:45	21	4	1	26
10:50	22	4	1	27
10:55	20	4	1	25
11:00	18	4	1	23
11:05	18	4	1	23
11:10	19	5	1	25
11:15	15	3	1	19

Max. #Screens	35
Ave. #Screens	20
Ave. #Facebook	4
Ave. #Vimeo	2
Ave. #YouTube	19



## Other Ministries

### *Affordable Housing Committee*

#### **KERA BARTLETT BINNS & SCOTT SPORTE, CO-CHAIRS**

The Affordable Housing Committee participated with development partner EBALDC to select Yes Duffy + David Baker Architects as the design team to work through planning and development of affordable housing on our campus. Late in 2023 the development team presented some of its initial thoughts on project potential on the northeast corner of our site, during a congregational forum showing preliminary concepts for a 70 unit building fronting on Dana Street with a mix of primarily 2 and 3 bedroom family apartments, along with a newly envisioned play area for the East Bay School for Boys.



This initial concept will go through multiple iterations as the developers seek project funding and work with First Church on our priorities for the project. Much more will unfold in 2024 as we move toward finalizing a project plan. The committee is developing a page on the First Church website dedicated to Q&A and project updates. Stay tuned for more on that!

Committee members are Kera Bartlett Binns (co-chair), Molly Baskette, Alice Clark, Sophia DeWitt, Lorenzo Llanillo, and Scott Sporte (co-chair). We gratefully thank Dan Leaverton for his service as he departed the committee during 2023 to focus on other responsibilities.

## *Progressive Christian Bible Study*

### **GEOFFREY GASKINS, M.DIV., CONVENER**

In 2024 we are beginning our 15th year and will be petitioning the folks at Guinness for recognition as the longest continuously running Progressive Christian Bible study in human history! (Not really. We'd have too much explaining to do!)

Our Progressive Christian Bible Study (PCBS) meets weekly, on Wednesday afternoons at 4 pm. We are currently meeting by Zoom only and will likely continue as an online program for the foreseeable future. (Maybe/maybe not. Stay tuned ...)



An interesting thing happened during the pandemic. First we attempted hybrid meetings, but we never quite got the hang of the technology. As COVID protocols got stricter we went 100% online and we're staying online not for COVID reasons any more, but 'cause people are finding us from around the country and at the moment, more of our people are joining from outside California.

In PCBS gatherings we do deep readings of the texts we engage, often engaging one text for years. These are primarily biblical texts, but not necessarily. We've worked with gnostic material, the Qur'an, Buddhist sutras, Hans Christian Anderson, Nietzsche, Marvin Gaye ...

PCBS is organized in cohorts with a new one beginning in February if enough folks are interested. If you're interested in joining, email me at [ggaskins@progressiveevangelical.org](mailto:ggaskins@progressiveevangelical.org) and let's talk.

Wishing you the holy challenge of understanding important things.

## Ministry Partners

### *Berkeley Pilgrimage Foundation*

**ROD MACKENZIE, BOARD PRESIDENT**



The Berkeley Pilgrimage Foundation (BPF) is a private foundation affiliated with First Church that supports housing, healthcare, and related services for seniors and people with disabilities in and around Berkeley.

This year, the grants team was Rod MacKenzie, Sophia DeWitt and Helen Walsh. We considered many organizations and ultimately made six grants totaling \$120,000.. Our grants for 2023 were as follows:

1. Youth Spirit Artworks: \$10,000
2. St. Mary's Center: \$30,000 (the first part of a three year \$65,000 commitment)
3. Berkeley Community Media Center: \$10,000
4. Lifelong Medical Care: \$50,000 (\$30,000 for Care at Home Program, \$20,000 for Berkley Street Medicine Program)
5. Ashby Village: \$20,000

We gratefully appreciate Scott Spote's continued support as Treasurer and Amy Hiestand as Secretary. Other board members are Sophia DeWitt, Jacki Dennis, Janet McDonald, Rod MacKenzie, and Helen Walsh.

#### How to Get Involved

We are always looking for new board and committee members! If you think you might want to volunteer with the Foundation, please reach out to Rod MacKenzie (rod.mackenzie@gmail.com) or any of the board members listed above. We'd love to hear from you!

***East Bay School for Boys***  
**TIM BAASE, SCHOOL COORDINATOR**

This has been a big year for EBSB! Under new leadership with Head of School Robert Smith, we welcomed 22 new sixth-grade students this fall. EBSB remains grateful to partner with the FCCB community to foster stewardship of the facilities and create a mutually beneficial environment that works for both students and churchgoers alike. As we look ahead to a growing student population and a changing campus, we are prioritizing the foundational concept of "Design Thinking" to ensure that we continue to grow and progress without sacrificing the core of what makes our school unique. We look forward to continuing to partner with FCCB on the joint mission of directly serving young people in the Bay Area -- and, to designing new ways that FCCB and EBSB can continue to serve our respective communities.



## ***Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministry of the UCC (PAAM)*** **QAISUL TAKIHUNANG, FIRST CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE**

### **Introduction to PAAM**

The Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries (PAAM), established in 1974 in San Francisco, plays a crucial role within the United Church of Christ (UCC). It focuses on representing and advocating for Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans. Since its official recognition in 1975, PAAM has been instrumental in tackling issues such as institutional racism, human rights, and justice, while bolstering the leadership within the church. Actively involved in the UCC, PAAM ensures broad representation in church boards and committees. The Northern California Nevada region, encompassed by PAAM, includes a variety of communities like Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Samoan, and Marshallese churches, all welcoming visitors.

### **My Background and Involvement in PAAM**



Since joining First Church Berkeley UCC as a new member in October 2023, I am grateful to Rev. Molly Baskette for recognizing my unique cultural heritage as a Taiwanese indigenous person and part of the Austronesian people. She encouraged and invited me to represent First Church in PAAM. Concurrently, as a student at the Pacific School of Religion pursuing a Master of Divinity, where there is a strong emphasis on multicultural inclusion and theological studies of diverse cultural contexts, I find synergy with First Church Berkeley UCC's Vision Statement. This focuses on values of radical inclusion and cross-cultural belonging, enabling me to utilize my multifaceted background as a

catalyst for rich, intercultural theological engagement in PAAM, and as a bridge among diverse communities.

### **2024 Ministry Plan**

Looking forward to the work in 2024, there will be monthly meetings of PAAM representatives. I plan to visit different PAAM churches each month to engage with and understand the members of these churches, and I will have the opportunity to deliver Sunday sermons. Additionally, I will write blog articles about the faith and experiences in PAAM church visits for First Church Berkeley UCC, sharing the faith life of UCC partners from different cultural backgrounds in the Northern California Nevada area with everyone.





First Filipino American United Church of Christ



Berkeley Chinese COMMUNITY Church, UCC

## *Pacific School of Religion*

### **KIMBERLY GRIFFITH, SR. ADMISSIONS COUNSELOR**



First Church has had a strong relationship with Pacific School of Religion (PSR) throughout its history. Several PSR students and alumnae have served our community in a variety of ways, and several First Church members have served on PSR's Board of Trustees and various committees. First Church has also hosted many of their significant events and conferences such as graduation and the Earl Lectures Series.

This year was an exciting one for the PSR community. In Fall 2023, it welcomed the most diverse incoming class in its 157 year history, with 68% being students of color and almost half identifying as LGBTQ+. Combined with continuing students, the new class brought PSR's enrollment to its highest in recent history.

In April, PSR professor Dorsey Blake was named the 2023 Distinguished Faculty Lecturer by the Graduate Theological Union's Council of Deans for embodying the scholarly standards, teaching excellence, and commitment to ecumenism that defines the consortium of schools.

PSR also received a grant of \$1.25 million from Lilly Endowment Inc. through their Thriving Congregations Initiative to fund an education and community-building program that uses project-based learning to help congregations adapt to changing social and cultural contexts and to reimagine the church in ways that deepen faith. This investment from Lilly is in addition to a generous \$5M grant given to PSR through its Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative last year.

In an effort to transform digital learning for leaders across the world, PSR's Ignite Institute has been championing a new platform for spiritual and social changemakers. This platform is currently in a testing phase, gathering valuable insight from over 100 testers regarding its courses, community engagement programs, and other key offerings.

PSR continues to partner with missionally aligned organizations—Berkwood Hedge Middle School and The Coleman Fung Institute for Engineering Leadership at UC Berkeley—to create a diverse learning community on the Pacific School of Religion campus.

*PSR's mission is to prepare a diverse cadre of spiritually rooted leaders with the vision, resilience, and skill to create a world where all can thrive. Grounded in the rigorous study and faithful practice of progressive Christian faith, PSR partners with students of all backgrounds to deepen their spirituality and enhance their capacity to lead in transformative ways.*

# Capital Fund Campaign

## *Campaign Chair*

**SARA WOODS**



In February 2023, Our church launched our **Build. Gather. Grow.** campaign. In the last half of 2022, our church discerned, we needed a capital campaign to raise the additional funds necessary for us to rebuild our primary program facility – which houses church offices, a large assembly, an outdoor worship and gathering space, a kitchen, classrooms/youth/meeting space, all-gender restrooms including a shower, and a library/co-working space – all light, bright, energy-efficient and fully accessible.

The Campaign Leadership Team dedicated themselves to organizing and executing a tremendously successful campaign. Many church members joined in helping with various tasks and attended Launch Parties, the Gathering in Spirit event, a Learning Hour on church and money. The entire congregation shared reflections, questions and conversations with each other about the importance of giving and what it means to be a part of FCCB.

Celebrating together at our incredible Gala and the offering of our financial commitments to the campaign on Commitment Sunday were highlights – symbols of thanksgiving, hope and praise for God’s presence in our lives and community. Together we raised more than \$1.75 million in commitments. We hope that others will consider gifts to the Capital Campaign in the next three years should they discern the enrichment that our community building brings to both our congregation and the community.

On a personal note, our dear Becky Smith, during her last year of life, took on service roles as part of our ad hoc team who shepherded in the process of planning for the campaign. She co-lead Advanced Commitments and was a lead giver in the campaign. Her spirit truly infused this campaign from start to finish. It continues as a legacy of Becky’s steadfast faith and the treasured church siblinghood that we all shared with her.



## Financial Reports

### *Treasurer*

#### **MOE WRIGHT**



This year was a difficult one for the accounting and administrative staff. The departure of our long-term Business Manager and bookkeeper, Kit Dunbar, late in 2022, created a break in continuity in both our management and accounting systems. We are still in the process of establishing procedures and routines. On the bright side, we have the opportunity to re-think and modernize our systems.

We welcomed August Laperche as our new Director of Operations in September and I have been working closely with them as we dive into the 2023 budget. Along with Sharlet Gilbert, our bookkeeper, we have been diligently working on not only the budget, but also the financial documentation that appears in this annual report. We hope to be back on track with full reporting next year.

Our mission is supported mostly through the Operating Budget. This year we had good results. After a year with modest management we ended up with a small surplus of \$1,312 out of a total budget of \$1,333,686. We did not use any council contingency which will roll over to next year. Sustaining commitments were strong as was income from our facilities. We benefited from a one-time increase in rent from EBSB due to make-up from some past due payments in 2022. This strong income paired with some underspending resulted in an almost balanced budget.

Next year, 2024, will be different. Our sustaining commitments are down about \$50,000 due to moving, deaths and life circumstances and we will not get additional facility income. In addition, expenses continue to increase. The result will be an operating loss of \$295,242. This loss will be balanced with funds from the council contingency and transitional funds. We are also authorized to borrow up to \$160,000 from our Ministerial Housing Endowment. The Investment Committee will work with me to create terms which include interest and a re-payment when funds are received in the transaction using our property for affordable housing.

We continue to move ahead with our Community Hall using funds from both the insurance settlement as well as the capital campaign. We have had a real benefit from having so much cash this last year. With higher interest rates, we have netted an additional \$150,000 to be used toward capital expenses on the new building.

2024 will be a year of consolidating and completing. We will complete the new Community Hall and put it to use for our congregation and also as another rental facility. We will consolidate our accounting and administrative systems so that we can operate in a more efficient manner in years to come.

## Six-Year Stewardship Review

Six-Year Stewardship Review						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Commitments						
Amount committed	\$682,039	\$664,071	\$620,000	\$634,322	\$581,122	\$519,782
# of commitments	162	166	161	175	163	144
Average	\$4,210	\$4,000	\$3,851	\$3,625	\$3,565	\$3,610
Commitment Actuals	\$685,732	\$656,913	\$604,212	\$609,248	\$482,522	TBD

## Buildings & Grounds Fund

Buildings and Grounds				
2023	Start Balance	Receipts	Disbursements	End Balance
Building and Ground Fund	\$ 67,784.19	\$51,205	\$ 3,040.00	\$ 115,949.19
Building Reserve Fund	\$10,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$10,000.00
<b>Total Buildings &amp; Grounds Funds</b>	<b>\$ 77,784.19</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$ 3,040.00</b>	<b>\$ 125,949.19</b>



## Funds

Activity Funds				
2023	Start Balance	Receipts	Disbursements	End Balance
<b>WORSHIP &amp; SPIRITUAL LIFE</b>				
Cazadero All Church Camp	\$9,328.64	\$0	\$0	\$9,328.64
Camp Scholarships	\$530.00	\$0	\$0	\$530.00
Advent /Lent Retreat Grp	\$2,803.42	\$0	\$0	\$2,803.42
Parish Nurse	\$994.90	\$0	\$0	\$994.90
Advertising	\$6,033.20	\$0	\$0	\$6,033.20
Memorial Service Guild	\$1,707.79	\$0	\$29.70	\$1,678.09
Spiritual training/direct	\$1,954.63	\$0	\$0	\$1,954.63
Social Action	-\$829.95	\$0	\$0	-\$829.95
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
Youth Groups	\$517.11	\$50	\$0	\$567.11
FamChY Events	\$1,400.05	\$0	\$ 622.40	\$777.65
Befrienders	\$57.50		\$0	\$57.50
Song of the Soul	\$1,304.92	\$0	\$ 7.22	\$1,297.70
Sunday School	\$1,704.36	\$0	\$0	\$1,704.36
Winthrop Work Camp	\$1,632.68	\$ 2,439.00	\$ 4,563.39	-\$491.71
Adult Ed	\$2,497.11	\$0	\$0	\$2,497.11
God Swag	-\$933.37	\$0	\$0	-\$933.37
<b>CARE &amp; FELLOWSHIP</b>				
Women's Voices & Retreat	-\$329.84	\$0	\$0	-\$329.84
Healing Services	\$500.00	\$0	\$0	\$500.00
Men's Group & Retreat	\$1,035.34	\$0	\$0	\$1,035.34
Fall All-Church Retreat	\$0.00	\$ 8,730.00	\$ 18,260.00	-\$9,530.00
Silent Retreat	\$0.00	\$0	\$ 6,240.00	-\$6,240.00
Senior Ministries (TE)	\$2,216.32	\$0	\$ 1,200.00	\$1,016.32
Montgomery trip	\$0.00	\$0	\$ 647.90	-\$647.90
<b>STEWARDSHIP, FINANCE &amp; AD</b>				
Transitional Tasks	\$41,140.05	\$0	\$5,000	\$36,140.05
Legal Expenses	\$1,500.00	\$0	\$0	\$1,500.00
<b>CHURCH COUNCIL</b>				
Council Contingency	\$126,111.20	\$0	\$0	\$126,111.20
Emergency Preparedness	\$2,558.55	\$0	\$0	\$2,558.55
Staff Retreat & Review	\$2,769.64	\$0	\$0	\$2,769.64
Background checks	\$607.95	\$0	\$0	\$607.95
<b>UNIVERSITY/YOUNG ADULTMIN</b>				
Young Adults	\$4,830.24	\$280	\$70	\$5,040.24
<b>Total Activity Funds</b>	<b>\$213,642.44</b>	<b>\$11,499</b>	<b>\$36,641</b>	<b>\$188,500.83</b>

<b>Donor Designated Funds</b>				
<b>2023</b>	<b>Start Balance</b>	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Disbursements</b>	<b>End Balance</b>
<b>Worship &amp; Spiritual Life</b>				
Music Fund (Resonance)	\$17,442.92	\$6,335	\$11,001	\$12,776.43
Music Fund (Piano & Organ)	\$9,480.29	\$0	\$0	\$9,480.29
Flower-Sanctuary Decor	\$8,070.23	\$675	\$1,041	\$7,704.23
Seminarian Support	\$592.37	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$592.37
<b>Church Council</b>				
Celebration Fund	\$38,613.65	\$0.00	\$400.00	\$39,013.65
Computer Fund	\$150.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$150.00
<b>Total Donor Designated Funds</b>	<b>\$ 74,349.46</b>	<b>\$ 7,010.00</b>	<b>\$ 12,442.49</b>	<b>\$ 69,716.97</b>

<b>Non-Budgeted Benevolence Funds</b>				
<b>2023</b>	<b>Start Balance</b>	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Disbursements</b>	<b>End Balance</b>
<b>Worship &amp; Spiritual Life</b>				
Pastors' Emergency Fund	\$3,000.17	\$210	\$2,100	\$1,110.17
<b>Outreach</b>				
SNAP Kids	0	\$2,372.25	\$2,372.25	0
Ethiopian Village Schools	0	\$4,756.25	\$4,756.25	0
Bethlehem Lutheran Church	0	\$2,377.00	\$2,377.00	0
Easter Offering (Sogorea Te Land Trust)	0	\$2,703.75	\$2,703.75	0
Oakland Catholic Workers	0	\$2,961.25	\$2,961.25	0
Stride Labs	0	\$2,152.00	\$2,152.00	0
Loomis Basin UCC	0	\$3,757.25	\$3,757.25	0
A Home Within	0	\$2,045.25	\$2,045.25	0
What If? Foundation	0	\$2,781.51	\$2,781.51	0
Women's Daytime Drop In Center	0	\$2,266.50	\$2,266.50	0
Justice in Motion	0	\$2,088.50	\$2,088.50	0
YLM (Young Lives Matter) Foundation	0	\$3,261.50	\$3,261.50	0
Trinity Center	0	\$2,410.00	\$2,410.00	0
Consider the Homeless! (Christmas Offering)	0	\$2,743.50	\$2,743.50	0
Church World Service (Christmas Offering)	0	\$2,696.50	\$2,696.50	0
<b>Total Non-Budgeted Benevolences</b>	<b>\$ 3,000.17</b>	<b>\$ 41,583.01</b>	<b>\$ 40,776.51</b>	<b>\$ 1,110.17</b>

## Statements

### A Seeker's Statement

Finding a home in God's wilderness, we seek to savor God and magnify the longings of Jesus. We dare to be uncertain. Practicing compassion and awakening conscience, we bear hope for a suffering world. In this Spirit, we honor one another in beloved community.

*Long Range Planning Committee, Fall 2003*

### Mission Statement

To bring ourselves and others to God,  
and to develop within us spiritual maturity so that we may be equipped for ministry  
in our lives and for mission in the world.

To celebrate the Good News  
of God's inclusive love for all people.

We are called to be a community of faith that invites spiritual transformation through  
the power of love, affirmation and inclusion;

to come to know ourselves as whole and healed;

to embrace our unique gifts;

and to act out of gratitude to help create a world of love, justice and harmony.

With God's love, following the teachings of Jesus, we recognize and celebrate the diversity of  
paths that will fulfill a vision of love and justice for all the world.

We are called to be a growing and inspired community, a beacon in the East Bay,  
renewing, reaching out, rejoicing. *January 2002*

### Open and Affirming Statement

We, as a diverse body of believers seeking to live in the light and image of God in Christ, do  
affirm:

- that every person has worth as a special and unique creation made in God's image;
- that in the Spirit of love, openness, and inclusiveness we welcome persons of every sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, nationality, ability and age to participate fully in all aspects of the Church's life and ministry;
- that as agents of reconciliation and wholeness we embrace justice and seek to support all who suffer discrimination or who are disenfranchised from the religious community;
- that in light of the gospel we will continue to comprehend and appreciate more fully our differences and gifts;
- that through grace our love for God and neighbor may flourish.

This ONA statement was originally passed by vote of the Congregation on April 2, 1995. It was amended (April 19, 2015) to include the phrases "gender identity" (referring to one's innermost core concept of self which can include male, female, a blend of both or neither, and many more)

and “gender expression” (referring to the ways in which one expresses gender identity to others).

### WISE Congregation for Mental Health

Affirming our faith in a God who loves and is embodied among all persons, and affirming our tradition as a welcoming congregation, First Congregational Church of Berkeley is a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) Congregation for Mental Health.

- We *welcome* people with mental health challenges and those who love them.
- We *include* those with mental health challenges in the life, work, and leadership of the congregation.
- We *support* people with mental health challenges and those who love them.
- We *engage* with other organizations at the intersection of mental health and spirituality.

We care about the whole person: body, heart, mind, and soul, and we claim the deep and constant movement of God’s Holy Spirit seeking to bring us fullness of life. All are beloved by God, and when one has a mental health challenge, one has a right to be known in one’s fullness. Likewise, those among us with mental health challenges have gifts to offer our faith community, and the community is called to receive them.

*(passed by vote of the Congregation on February 3, 2019)*

### Vision Statement

We are a community that values radical inclusion and artful worship, where belonging is more important than belief, and joy is a guiding principle. We are a restorative sanctuary for the suffering and weary, a space for creative and contemplative ritual, and a hub for transformative moral action on the justice issues of our day.

Guided by these values, God calls us to:

- Grow in intimacy as the weird and wonderful Body of Christ
- Provide a diversity of open but distinctly Christian, creative and liberating worship forms to nourish the spiritual lives of the current community and reach new seekers
- Follow Jesus’s urging to minister to the “least of these” [Matthew 25] by addressing our region’s most visible and urgent human needs: ending homelessness in the East Bay, and its intersecting justice issues

### **Vision Elaboration**

- **Grow in intimacy as the weird and wonderful Body of Christ**  
First Church fosters extravagant welcome, connection/community and compassion. We are called to grow in love with one another, a foundation for living out the teachings of Jesus in the wider world. To do so, we will facilitate small groups, intergenerational engagement, and community spiritual practices that will bond and bind us together.

- **Provide a diversity of open but distinctly Christian, creative and liberating worship forms to nourish the spiritual lives of the current community and reach new seekers**  
 Less than 3% of Berkeley identifies as main- line Protestant. That leaves many folks unaware of or uninitiated into the richness of our progressive Christian faith. The UCC Constitution affirms “the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship.” We will experiment with new forms of worship to go deeper on our own spiritual journeys, attract new- comers who may have been hurt or excluded by other Christian churches, and pique the interest of those who have never considered Christianity a viable option. The worship experiments may include, but not be limited to:
  - Worship days and times outside of Sunday morning
  - Virtual/digital worship and spiritual formation
  - Lay-led and participatory worship experiences
  - Outdoor worship
  - Services geared toward multiple generations/learning styles
  - Contemplative worship
  - Cross-cultural worship, and
  - Spiritual formation on retreat
- **Follow Jesus’s urging to minister to the “least of these” [Matthew 25] by addressing our region’s most visible and urgent human needs: ending homelessness in the East Bay, and its intersecting justice issues**  
 The suffering of homeless people is evident on our streets every day. Countless more suffer housing insecurity in less visible ways. We are moved by the teachings of Jesus to respond with love, compassion and generosity. We will join with the wider community (faith communities, non-profit organizations, and government agencies) to educate, advocate, and take action to prevent homelessness, to reduce the suffering it causes, and to restore individuals and families to safe, permanent, dignified shelter.  
*September 2019*

### Sanctuary Movement Pledge

The Church Council voted in June 2017 to sign the National Sanctuary Movement Pledge and formally establish itself as a Sanctuary Congregation.

#### National Sanctuary Movement Pledge

We pledge to resist any policy proposals to target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants and discriminate against marginalized communities. We will open our congregations and communities as sanctuary spaces for those targeted by hate, and work alongside our friends, families and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.