

*“We kindle the light within and inspire courage to nurture the web of life  
and to create a just and compassionate world”*



# The Light at the End of the Tunnel

(Pandemic year #3)

FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF OTTAWA  
ANNUAL REPORT 2022



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*Board Games Night!*

# Pandemic Poetry

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## *In the Time of Pandemic*

And the people stayed home.

And they read books, and listened, and rested,  
and exercised, and made art, and played games,  
and learned new ways of being, and were still.

And they listened more deeply. Some meditated,  
some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows.

And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed.

And, in the absence of people living in ignorant,  
dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth  
began to heal.

**And when the danger passed, and the people  
joined together again, they grieved their  
losses, and made new choices, and dreamed  
new images, and created new ways to live and  
heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.**

*-Kitty O'Meara*

# Programming

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## Message from the Minister

-Rev Eric Meter



While the reports before you now bear the subheading Jan – Dec 2022, I find it difficult not to think instead of the church program year that will soon come to a close. So I hope you'll forgive me for not going as far back as the winter/spring of 2022, **and for** including items that took place during the last several months.

This has been a year of both establishing new patterns as well as transitions.

Rev. Ellen Bell has retired, and our Facility Manager, Lori Clarke, has announced her retirement effective mid-May. Jenn Berntson began parental leave last December and is scheduled to return at the end of the coming summer. At that time we will also say farewell to Kirk Adsett who has been a phenomenal replacement for Jenn during her leave.

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This winter we also said goodbye to Neo Yaxley as director of religious exploration (DRE). Jodi McIntosh stepped in shortly after to lead the Coming of Age program and is now overall RE program assistant. The search for a new Director of Religious Exploration will begin this summer.

Last autumn we celebrated the return of the Fall Fair. I had been told not to expect as much of an event this year, as it would be a smaller fair than usual. Well, if this Fall Fair was smallish, I am sure my imagination will be stretched by a regular one. A hearty thanks to Carol Card and all the many others who made this year's Fair the success it was.

In October we also formally celebrated the start of our ministry together with the installation ceremony. Soon I'll be heading off to the ordination of a former congregant, and as much as anything, I'm looking forward to showing off the clerical stole you presented me at that time. Thanks to everyone involved in making that occasion a deeply meaningful as it was.

By design, the installation was a celebration of shared ministry, the work we take on together. This is something I've discussed at length with the congregation's lead minister advisory team. (Such a group is often called a Committee on Ministry, though I chose a different name for it here not to create any confusion with the Committee on Shared Ministry.) In any case, based on those conversations with the advisory team, I'll be returning to the theme of shared ministry over the next several weeks during our Sunday services. Jane Lindsay, who chaired the Search Team that brought me to FirstU, will soon complete her service on the advisory team. I'll present a name to the Board for her replacement shortly.

Let me say a bit more about Religious Exploration before continuing to other subjects. By all accounts, the congregation's program peaked years ago now, and Covid-19 hurt congregational programs for children and youth everywhere. Still, for the last year or more our program has been coming back to life. Last summer's comprehensive Our Whole Lives-based summer camps started this revival. Monthly youth



gatherings, the return of Mystery Pals late this winter, OWL, Coming of Age and plans for a Justice Camp week this summer show that momentum is continuing.

Some of you have asked me why I didn't immediately begin a search for a new DRE after Neo's departure. This was a fair question. Frankly, I wanted to see what volunteer support would come forward. Now that I've seen what the congregation will lead with, I know more of what we need from our next program director. (The same is true for how we will move forward now that Rev. Ellen has retired from providing pastoral and spiritual care. A retirement party for Rev. Ellen is still in the works. The date should be set shortly.)

Moving on, arguably the most important decision of the year was the recent overwhelmingly positive votes to cede land for the establishment of deeply affordable housing on our campus. As I said then, I believe this was the most impactful decision the congregation made since it voted to move to our current location from Elgin Street back in the 1960s.

This vote was both the culmination of years of effort, and the start of work we'll be engaged in for years to come. I hope the recent 'Just Get Over It' workshop will be the first of many such opportunities, and was thrilled that our Truth and Reconciliation Action Group sponsored the training for members of our community in addition our sister congregations in Ottawa's east side: Peterborough and Kingston, Unitarian House, Congregation Or Haneshamah and River Parkway Children's Centre.

In three weeks, we and members of Ottawa's Fellowship will host the Canadian Unitarian Council's first in-person conference in five years at Algonquin College. I've been checking in with Maury Prevost and Kathy Yach, our leads in this work, as well as being part of several zoom calls each week with CUC staff, other leaders and the Revs. Diane Rollert and Fulgence Ndagijimana as the programs and worship services are being crafted. While all this has proven to be quite an effort, I can't wait to see how everything unfolds. The symposium promises to be a great event both for the CUC and for our community.

Lastly, three other items. First, I hope you have or soon will take note of the changing office configurations. The wing has been repainted. Some offices are being moved. A new volunteer centre is being created. Our hope is that in all of this we be more welcoming and efficient. And those who have volunteered to help in the office deserve all of our thanks and support.

Second, while we mention it each Sunday morning, we do so briefly: if you haven't stopped to look at the grow towers Ajashki manages, I hope you will do so soon. This winter I went there almost every day I was in the office. I often said this is to get an oxygen fix and while that's true in part, I also wanted to bask, if even for a moment, in the presence of green life. That, and the leafy greens are delicious.

Third, while I made a point in my report to you last year about how impressed I was with Fellowship Hour (then Hospitality Hour), the return I've been most happy with is the return of Coffee Hour.



Tarrel and Co. have brought back to life something I had taken as a given elsewhere in my ministries. No longer. The informal gathering is the heart of any community.

I only hope our bookstore will find the support it needs to continue as well.

In shared faith,

Rev. Eric H. Meter

## Religious Exploration

*-Jodi McIntosh*

Our children's program aims to provide children with opportunities for growth through creating a supportive environment where individual children's diverse ways of being are celebrated. We strive to kindle the light within each child. We do this in community through play, song, themed activities and a bit of structured curriculum thrown in for good measure.

We consciously strive to model UU values and take advantage of teachable moments. Our numbers are currently low, however, those who attend are committed to Sunday mornings. Our parent's needs, like the children's, are diverse. Some choose to stay downstairs where they get to join other parents in fellowship and community. Whereas some parents choose to use this time to go upstairs and be able to be physically, emotionally and spiritually present in the service while they know their children are being well cared for.

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During the summer months we offered outdoor activities including water balloons, sidewalk chalk, and so many of the children's favorite, the giant sandbox. We also had a volunteer from Ajashki come and help with the new children's garden. Where we planted edible flowers that bloomed most of the summer.

The program may be small but we had a dedicated staff including the DRE Neo Yaxley, and RE assistant Rita Ross who work together to provide a program that children want to come back to every week.



*Messy Church*

## Music Program



Jenn Berntson is on parental leave! We will welcome her back this coming summer. Kirk Adsett has been hired as the Interim Music Director while Jenn is on leave.

By the end of 2023 all three choirs, Chalice, Fusion and Three Rivers, were practicing in the building, masked. A Christmas Concert happened, the first since the pandemic began. The choirs in the building were one more positive step toward the return of a post-pandemic era.



# Administration

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## Message from the President, Board of Directors

-Brent Nicolle



FirstU is always a busy place and 2022 proved no exception to this rule, and the Board has been actively engaged with the congregation all along the way. Here is a rough summary.

Over the course of the year, FirstU slowly transitioned to “a new normal”, while respecting our COVID Task Force’s measured relaxations to guidelines that kept everyone’s health in mind. We learned new tricks: Virtual Hospitality Hour was replaced with Hybrid Hospitality Hour. Our in-person activities expanded beyond Sunday services, to a Welcome Barbecue for Reverend Eric and Ann in May, a Pride Film night in August, an installation ceremony for Reverend Eric in October, a successful return to our Fall Fair tradition in November and a beautiful Advent Spiral in December. There were significant online meetings as well, including a

Leadership Council on Event Communications in March, another on Giving Up Racism in October, and a very dynamic meeting where the Congregation directed the Board to work on a Master Concept Plan.

We built closer relationships with our existing campus partners, led in part by Campus Planning activities, but also through consciously improving communications. This included a joint board meeting with Unitarian House in April, a tour of River Parkway Children’s Centre facilities, and an invitation for Or Haneshamah to join with us in the Pride Parade in August. Significantly, Mary Ella Keblusek became the FirstU representative on the Unitarian House board (replacing Blair Erskine), which helped provide a useful conduit for their issues and plans as well as our own. This investment reaped dividends swiftly: by mid-year we learned that the city needed a long-term detour to Cleary Avenue for LRT (light rail transit) construction, and we were able to quickly address concerns from all partners. We also were able to work with our campus partners as we planned our affordable housing project.

We also forged an exciting new long-term relationship in 2022, with Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS). This progressed from the Board meeting their senior leaders in-person in June, visiting their Peterborough site in August, working alongside them at a site design charrette, and inviting them to speak to the congregation at a Sunday service in September. We are very pleased with the excitement that this new campus partner has generated within the congregation, including inspiring our Ajashki food-security garden project to stretch their potential.

Various Board members participated in cross-Canada Zoom workshops, offered by the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), including Nurturing Spiritual Leadership and Widening the Circle. One especially notable meet-up, initiated by Mary Bennett in Vancouver, was a Zoom round-table for Canadian Unitarian board leaders. This forum helped to compare notes on common issues with other congregations: membership, governance, communications, etc. I look forward to meeting some of these Canadian Unitarian friends at the 2023 CUC Symposium in Ottawa. In fact, the decision to host this symposium was aided by conversations with previous organizers. The organizational effort of the Symposium started in the fall of 2022, and I am grateful to Maury Prevost, Kathy Yach and Lisa Sharp for their early involvement.





Finally, we welcomed a steady stream of new and returning congregants. Week after week, newcomers arrived at our doors seeking spirituality, community, like-minded attitudes to social justice, or responsible family-based values such as our Our Whole Lives (OWL) program. For this reason, all of our programs are valuable, and I thank everyone who helped make 2022 the success that it was.

## Operations and Facility Management

*-Jen Brennan, Operations Manager*

2022 meant staff (other than the custodians, who worked alone during the entire pandemic) began to come into the church again to work. I myself returned full-time in October. It has been such a pleasure working in person again with colleagues and congregants alike, it almost feels like normal has returned.

Once most provincial Covid restrictions were withdrawn, the rentals came pouring in. In June 2022 alone we grossed our entire 'one-time rental' budget for the year.

We also made connections with the producer of Harmony Concerts to be a recurring venue; you can read the eUU for upcoming concerts that will be held here.

The Covid Task Force met less, and there was less stress involved in creating guidelines for use of space. This marked a positive step towards returning to more typical activity in the church.

In March we received \$10,000 from The Ontario Grant to Support Anti-Hate Security Measures for Faith-Based and Cultural Organizations. We put these funds towards a multi-camera security system which allows us to view what happens on the campus 24/7.

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We said good-bye to Gareth Auden-Hole as our AV Coordinator, and welcomed Julia Defalco into that role. As Covid waned we realized we were going to be in the business of offering hybrid services going forward. We purchased equipment, including a large screen and projector which are suspended from the ceiling of Worship Hall. Our pursuit of a sufficient system is ongoing.

The consistent presence of social media posts has boosted our presence on Facebook and persons signing up to receive the eUU. My thanks to Allison, our Communications Coordinator, for her expertise and attention to preparing consistent and thought-provoking messages to bring interest to our congregation.

At the end of 2022 we began a switch to a new room booking and support services allocation program, and 2023 will see everyone learn how to use it.

## Finance and Human Resources

*-Michelle Jackson*

The Finance and Human Resource Manager (FHRM) is a full time position at FirstU. The FHRM manages the Finance, Human Resource and Membership aspects of FirstU on a daily basis. I sit on the Finance and Personnel committees and attend Board meetings as a non-voting member. I work closely with several teams and task forces as a liaison concerning membership, volunteers, fundraising and various financial campaigns. The FHRM supports the Purpose, Mission and Vision of FirstU in all aspects of management.

As the Finance Manager I am responsible for overseeing the annual Audit as well as ensuring all other CRA filing requirements are documented and filed. I establish compliance while managing expectations of congregants to align with the requirements of CRA for maintaining FirstU's charitable organization status. The preparation and gathering of information of the draft budget is the responsibility of the FHRM. The adherence and maintenance of the passed budget is managed by the FHRM. Managing



documents and tracking funds are part of my daily routine to support fundraising, financial campaigns and various other endeavours of FirstU.

In 2022 FirstU had 5 full time and 6 part time paid staff. A portion of Ajashki's employees were also part of FirstU's payroll under my administrative obligations. The administration, record keeping and financial oversight of HR concerning budget compliance is my responsibility.

With limited time and many hands the management and maintenance of the FirstU database for membership is an administrative duty that I heavily rely on volunteers to help me with. Moving into 2023 and post Covid I hope to start the much needed thorough maintenance of this system.

Volunteers participate in every aspect of FirstU, as such I am very excited to introduce the old photocopier room off worship hall as the new and welcoming Volunteer space! The freshly painted new offices and volunteer room has given new energy to staff and volunteers for 2023 with an air of excitement at finally getting everyone back together.

## Library

*-Brian Cowan*

The principle purpose of the adult lending library is to provide access to our UU history and values mainly by way of the written word (as well as by a few audio and video recordings). There is a system of index cards by title and author. I am the only person at present maintaining the library of just under 1,000 items.

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Due to COVID-19 restricting access to the church in 2022 there was little library activity, although a few items did get borrowed and a few books were donated. The only goal for 2022 was to keep the library organized in the hope of better days to come. This goal was partly accomplished although not entirely in that I was unable to attend to the library for some months. In terms of finances, the library has no budget. Any minor expenses are picked up under the budget of the church office.

Upon my return to library duties in January 2023, I was able to repair some minor disorganization in regard to our library shelves and bring matters into an acceptable condition once again; my goal is to maintain this condition going forward. One of the goals of our 5 Year Strategic Plan is to foster an energized spirituality. I believe that our library books and other items can assist in the realization of this goal.

## Archives

*-Susan Schaller*

The Archives volunteers assist office staff and the congregation in maintaining an accurate and up to date filing system for the congregational records.

The purpose of our Archives team is to help find documents (if we have them), to help safeguard the retention of documents we are legally obligated to keep, and to help preserve the main outlines of our congregational history. Paper documents are filed in several cabinets on site. Electronic documents are collected via an inbox, archives@firstunitarianottawa.ca, and at this time are still being printed for filing in the cabinets on site. In addition, there is a small storage room downstairs holding paper records, historical books, building blueprints, etc. Selected records prior to 1997 have been archived with the City of Ottawa Archives.

As of this writing, the Archives team consists of two members. In June of 2022 Brian Cowan announced that he was stepping down from the role of the Lead Archives volunteer, although he remains as a member



of the Archives volunteer team. The role of Lead Archives Volunteer is now held by Suzanne Schaller, who joined in the later part of 2022. We are open to welcoming new volunteers to assist with tasks.

During 2022 both Suzanne and Brian assisted in locating documents needed by office staff and members of the congregation. Brian supported Michelle in organizing documents in her office and filing records of various committees, the Board of Directors and other documents. Tracking spreadsheets exist which are regularly updated. There were some clean-up tasks and backlog that had accumulated due to COVID shut-downs when access to the building was limited. Brian also spent time passing his valuable knowledge to Suzanne, which he continues to do in 2023.

Moving forwards, Suzanne is looking into options for electronic filing, such as a cloud-based electronic storage space. There is an opportunity to file committee records and governance documents that are created electronically in their electronic format.

As well, Suzanne has noted that several of our committees have not been sending their minutes for filing. She will be engaging committee chairs in 2023 to remind them to keep FirstU's records up to date by sending documents to the archives email address for addition to FirstU's records. In line with the Strategic Plan, we want to ensure that important documents that may be currently scattered on members' personal computers or in emails are saved centrally for the benefit of future members and staff of FirstU. Within the Strategic Plan, Objective O21 ("Effective internal communications and a breakdown of organizational "silos") and Strategy S21.2 ("Cloud-Based calendars and file storage available for all Teams, Groups & Committees") are the areas where we see the Archives team contributing.

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In-person Bridge!



# Committees of the Board

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## Campus Planning Committee (CPC)

*-Terry Kimmel, chair*

Assist the Board and the Congregation by studying, providing advice and making recommendations for policies and plans related to campus planning. The CPC is focused on delivering on the congregation's approved motions to build more affordable housing on campus (A FIRM COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL AND CLIMATE JUSTICE) and an integrated campus plan (A RESPONSIBLE, MISSION-ORIENTED CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT) as part of a Master Concept Plan for the campus (RELIABLE STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT CONGREGATIONAL PRIORITIES & GROWTH).

The CPC started the year with the following representatives; Blair Erskine, David Chernushenko, Bill Van Iterson, Terry Kimmel, Lavonne Carter (RPCC), Mark Dermer (OrH), Bruce Grant (UHO), Kathy Yach and Lisa Sharp. Later in the year Bruce Grant was replaced by Brian Castledine, Mark Dermer was replaced by Diana Ralph, Kathy Yach left and Werner Daechsel joined.

The CPC addressed and completed each of its goals for the year. Specifically they referred to approval of a Feasibility study, having a Master Concept Plan for development completed, and identifying an affordable housing partner.

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Activities of the CPC centred on the feasibility study results and moving to the Master Concept Plan. Along this process several Town Halls were held with the congregation and meetings were held directly at Unitarian House with its residents.

In January of 2022 a Town Hall was held to report the findings of the Feasibility Study to the congregation. The results of the Feasibility Study led to 2 buildings being recommended, an affordable housing building and a mid-rise market building (with a good deal of below market housing). This result was based on a set of factors that were given to Cahdco, our affordable housing partner. The Feasibility Study results were accepted by the congregation at a special meeting. That led to Cahdco and Theia Partners (developers of the proposed project) providing a Letter of Intent (LOI) to proceed with a Master Concept Plan (MCP) for the campus. The Board endorsed the LOI at its March meeting. The intent is to have the MCP completed by November. The committee members were generally impressed with the content of the proposal, especially as it deals with reconciliation, the environment, and other shared values.

Also, around this time the CPC and Board entered discussions with Unitarian House regarding a lease extension and the possible advancement of lease fees beginning in 2023. Both sides presented lease fee numbers for negotiation. Further talks ended and have not been renewed.

At this time there were concerns raised by River Parkway Children's Centre about its future on the campus, there being rumours that its location could be considered for development. Board members met with RPCC to allay those fears.

In April the CPC was presented with the prospect of the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) becoming our affordable housing partner. This very much met our objectives of having any development on campus deliver on reconciliation. We also considered other potential partners like Multifaith Housing but recognized that they had several developments in the works and a project at FirstU would have to wait several years. An April meeting with the Executive Director of OAHS took place.



The CPC developed a due diligence list to ensure that OAHS was the appropriate partner. The CPC, Board and other congregants met with representatives of OAHS in Fellowship Hall to discuss the due diligence questions. OAHS was enthusiastically endorsed by all. The relationship has grown through the year with the Executive Director speaking at a Sunday service.

An April 19th Congregational Meeting was held at which time the Master Concept Plan terms and conditions were endorsed.

The Integrated Task Force, consisting of FirstU and campus partners (including OAHS) was formed to support the MCP by identifying some amenities that could be included in the plan. Such things as a gathering space, playgrounds, pathways, etc. were discussed and brought to the developers.

The activities associated with relationships with Unitarian House and those involved in the MCP involved both the CPC and the FirstU Board. The Board took on a leadership role as the Master Concept Plan was being developed and worked closely with the CPC through the process.

Towards the end of 2022 it became known that Cleary Avenue would be closed due to LRT traffic and that a temporary road would be constructed. CPC and the Board were involved in negotiations with the contractors.

The MCP was presented to CPC and the Board at the end of December. The intent was to have the board and CPC discuss the plan, perhaps suggest some modest changes and then introduce it to the congregation in January. Following a number of congregational Town Halls and presentations to our campus partners the vote would take place at a special meeting.

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We expect to move towards a vote on the Master Concept Plan and if approved by the congregation support our developers on getting the necessary approvals to allow construction to begin, likely in 2024. Working on affordable housing with the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services supports our social action objective as well as playing a small but meaningful role in reconciliation. Developing a mixed market rent building will bring revenue to the congregation and help sustain FirstU to continue its other good works. This leading edge development (both in its physical nature as well as its spiritual nature) will raise the profile of FirstU as a faith community and potentially lead to an increased awareness of Unitarian Universalism.



*Congregational Picnic*



## Embracing Diversity Committee

*-Kris Cormier, chair*

EDC's mandate is to assist FirstU "to be an intentionally welcoming and inclusive community, both within the Congregation itself and in its engagement with the broader community." By making our space feel more welcoming to people of all identities and background we are consistent with FirstU's mission of creating a "[...] just and compassionate world."

We planned & put on the annual Pride service again this year. We organized 1U (& UUFO) involvement in the Ottawa Capital Pride parade. We bought a new "progress"-style Pride flag which was displayed outside.

We launched the "UUPride" social/support group for 2SLGBTQ+ UUs & held monthly virtual groups for about 6 months. Although there was about a dozen people interested in the group, we ran into difficulty in several areas (need for involved co-facilitator, Zoom-bombing harassment incident which caused distress).

With our new Diversity@firstunitarianottawa.ca email address, we created a "hub" for folks to send news/info related to 2SLGBTQ+ issues which helped some congregants feel as though someone was attending to their concerns.

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We hope to launch the new pronoun stickers for the bolo nametags. This will be accompanied by a skit & a "Gender & Pronouns 101" workshop.

We will continue bringing the Welcoming Guide & related training to front-facing groups in the congregation.

We hope to collaborate with other EDI-focused groups to support this important work. We will continue to be available to all UU staff & members of the congregation for consulting on for 2SLGBTQ+ issues.



## Finance Committee

*-Phil Nagy, chair*

The Finance Committee in conjunction with the Manager of Finance and Human Resources, has responsibility for monitoring our overall finances, managing our investments and annual audit, directing the annual pledge drive, coordinating the donation of major gifts and bequests, and communicating our overall financial health to the membership. The committee has added one new member, Eric Ranger, and seeks another. Committee members include Andrew Drake, Margaret Linton, Philip Nagy (chair), Eric Ranger, Charles Triemstra and, ex officio, the Manager of Finance and Human resources, Michelle Jackson.

Activities consisted of the annual audit review and recommendations, review of and input to the 2023 budget preparation, ongoing review and updating of financial policies, and initiation and direction of the annual pledge campaign.



The FinCom contributes to the Strategic Plan as follows:

- Objectives O15, O16 O17. FinCom ensures that campus development, campus maintenance, and the affordable housing initiative proceed in a financially responsible manner.
- Objective O18. This objective is the primary responsibility of the Finance Committee, through the budget, the audit, the pledge drive, our investments, and our management of major gifts and planned giving.

The relationship of our finances to the strategic plan needs to be monitored. Are our resources being used effectively to achieve our strategic plan? Data to address this question will have to come from several sources. Who will be responsible for that? If it falls to the Financial Committee, we will have to make a plan for it.

## Governance Committee

*-Guy Belleperche*

The Governance Committee assists the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review, propose and recommend policies for, and facilitate communication related to, governance matters. It currently consists of Guy Belleperche, Eva Berringer, and Bill Van Iterson. Brent Nicolle, has also been a regular attendee and contributor.

12 The Governance Committee reviews and updates existing governing documents and policies and works with other committees and teams to develop new policies where required.

We updated the General Operating Bylaw to reflect the coming into force of the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010, to include the Relational Covenant, to use gender neutral pronouns throughout, to harmonize notification procedures, to allow for terms for elected directors of 1 or 2 years, and to include the 8th Principle. We assisted the Board with its self-evaluation process. We also completed initial revisions of our Charitable Purposes and received Board approval to submit them to CRA for their review.

The Governance Committee assists the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review, propose and recommend policies for, and facilitate communication related to, governance matters. It currently consists of Guy Belleperche, Eva Berringer, and Bill Van Iterson. Brent Nicolle, has also been a regular attendee and contributor.

The Governance Committee reviews and updates existing governing documents and policies and works with other committees and teams to develop new policies where required.

Key activities will be:

- Reviewing revised and new policies, addressing gaps in policies; recommending policy approval to the Board; (ongoing activity)
- Addressing comments and feedback from CRA on our Charitable Purposes with the goal of submitting them to the Congregation for approval at the Fall Congregational Meeting;
- Beginning the work of updating our Articles of Incorporation;
- Guiding the Board through the self-evaluation process. (annual activity)



## Nominating Committee

*-Joe Connor*

The Nominating Committee exists to recruit new members when vacancies occur in the congregation's Board of Directors. In calendar year 2022 the Nominating Committee had a quiet time compared our work in the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. In those two years, without ever having met face to face around a table due to Co-vid restrictions, we nominated a total of fifteen individuals: 7 to the Board at various times and 8 members to the Ministerial Search Committee.

In 2022 the committee of Barb Ryan, Tara Patterson, Sharmila Khare, Mary Jackson, Mike Fletcher and Joe Connor had the comparatively easy task of recruiting just one new member, Mary Ella Keblusek, to serve on the Board of Directors.

With the loosening of Covid restrictions at the church, we hope the new Nominating Committee will be able to utilize the Committee's best friend, Coffee Hour after church On Sundays. That time in Fellowship Hall offers the opportunity to talk to individuals, to explain the Board duties, and recruit new members of the congregation to serve.

At this time the retiring members of the Nominating Committee would like to express our gratitude to the Board Presidents who were in office during the difficult days of the pandemic, Guy Belleperche, Lisa Sharp and Brent Nicolle. We greatly appreciated your constant support and encouragement and especially your problem solving in our most trying moments.

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## Personnel Committee

*-Chuck Shields*

The mandate of the committee is to assist the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to personnel general practices and policies. The committee shall also provide assistance, as requested, to staff regarding personnel matters. As stated in the committee's charter, its membership consists of 5-7 people:

- The Lead Minister, and at least one Director shall serve as members.
- The Board of Directors shall appoint additional members from the Congregation.
- The Board of Directors shall designate the Committee Chair.
- Membership should provide a balance of skills, experiences, and gifts that include:
  - Knowledge and experience, either general or specific, in human resources and/or
  - Personnel management.
  - Knowledge of the mission and goals of the Congregation.

Currently Membership includes: Amy Berube (board rep), Barry Coburn, Michelle Jackson, Kate Kirkwood, Rev. Eric Meter and Chuck Shields.

A sub-group has been working on gathering information for a review of staff compensation that takes into consideration local and national benchmarks.

The committee will continue working on the compensation review. It has been asked by the Board to review the form and process used for minister's performance review and will be looking at rotation of some of its members. The committee, as noted in the Strategic Plan, has a role in addressing the objective that staff feel supported, motivated and have high job satisfaction. While the minister, as chief of staff, has the lead in directing how this will be accomplished, the committee is available to assist and will monitor that identified actions take place.





# Fundraising

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## Fall Fair

*-Carol Card, chair*

The Fall Fair generally runs a large bazaar in November, which is the major fundraiser for the congregation. A large number of volunteers, many from outside FirstU, transform nearly all areas of the church building into a giant marketplace. The purpose is to raise funds for the operations of the church, build community within and beyond the congregation, disperse unsold donations to charitable organizations, and put our environmental principles into practice in dealing with waste and recyclables.

As planned, we held an online auction in the spring through a local auctioneer, raising \$19K for FirstU. We were also able to organize, for the first time in three years, our November Fall Fair bazaar. With Covid numbers still fairly high, however, we opted for a smaller version of our sale. The three main changes were as follows: (1) we reduced the number of sales areas to avoid shopper congestion; (2) fewer volunteers were available because some of our usual helpers did not feel safe working in person; and (3) we had less lead time, given the need to wait until September to assess the Covid situation and receive the go-ahead (which meant less advertising and lower donations). Although proceeds, at approximately \$27K, were down from previous years as a result of these constraints, the sale was nonetheless a success, with happy customers and volunteers, and no significant problems.

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Review the format of the Fall Fair (see below) and plan for a sale to be held on Saturday, November 18, 2023.

A small but significant number of Fall Fair coordinators and convenors have indicated that they will not be continuing in their roles next year. As a result, we will need either to recruit additional leaders and volunteers or to reduce the scale of our annual bazaar.



*Fall Fair volunteers*



# Teams

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## Adult Learning Team

-Wendy Doyle

The Adult Learning Team promotes learning for all ages as a fundamental spiritual practice in our community, with intention, willingness and forethought. We coordinate and manage the structure and process of providing learning opportunities for adults consistent with the mission and charitable purposes of the congregation.

In spite of Covid restrictions, the Adult Learning Team was able to hold the Rare Book Workshop from the Montreal Jewish Public Library, on October 24, 2022, rescheduled from March 2020.

Many of the groups under the Adult Learning Team continued to meet by Zoom during 2022.

This includes the Bridge Group, the Wednesday Evening Meditation Group, the Thursday Evening and the Friday Reading for Growth Groups, the Poetry Sharing Group, the Spirituality and Philosophy Discussion Group and the Women's Personal Growth Group. No funds were raised because the groups were not meeting in person.

15 The Empower Dance Group continued to meet in a member's home each week.

Some of the Knitters Group have been able to meet at the church or outdoors when possible. Many knitters work on items at home. They plan to continue knitting items for the Fall Fair and the Mitten Tree.

The leadership of the Adult Learning Team, which will be called the Adult Learning and Growth Program, will be taken over by Jane Lindsay and Eva Berringer. They hope to lead the rebuilding of a robust program of Adult Learning and Growth activities at FirstU Ottawa. With interest groups still active, Eva and Jane will concentrate on getting 1 or 2 multi-session workshops offered to support new members and longer time congregants to explore UUism at FOU (in collaboration with Welcome & Membership) and to look in more depth at how leading UU ministers have, over time, articulated key aspects of UUism. They also hope to initiate a new offering of chalice / covenant groups.



*Rev Eric at work!*



## Caring Network Executive

*-Maryan O'Hagan, chair*

The Caring Network is responsible for encouraging and nurturing a caring presence in the congregation. There are 8 members currently on the executive, and a number of volunteers who carry out activities as required. The whole congregation has a responsibility to provide a caring presence and as such is part of the Caring Network.

Activities during the year

- Caring Contacts, two per month, outreach by phone to those who are referred,
- direct requests for assistance to appropriate persons including the minister, arrange for Caring cards to be sent to those requesting
- 52 Caring Cards were sent as condolences to families for: death of family member; to those recovering from illness or surgery; congratulations on new baby, promotion, anniversary, milestone birthday etc.
- An executive member links with the Spiritual Care Council
- 42 Christmas Cards were sent to those isolated and/or facing challenges
- Recognition and thank you to the Caring Network as a whole through messaging and photos in the e-UU during February heart month
- 26 Caring Contact volunteers were sent a thank you card and a tea bag in volunteer month in April

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Group's Plan for moving forward:

- Following Caring-themed service in March, an increased emphasis on caring through postings and Religious Exploration
- Promotion of theme Caring is for Everyone

## Communications and Outreach Team

*-Jen Brennan*

The purpose of the Communications and Outreach Team is to assist the Board in ensuring effective communications both within and external to the Congregation.

In 2022 the Team launched a Photo Directory, and with the help of Bob Armstrong this was populated and formatted. Unfortunately, there was low interest for this and the project has since been cancelled.

In early 2022 we participated in a Leadership Council with a presentation on 'How We Use Social Media' and 'How Can You Tell Your Own Story to Champion your Cause.' We suggested you use your own experience at FirstU, which is a genuine story ripe to be shared with conviction as it is your positive experience. We also suggested that we need to define what we want our congregation to look like, and will need to make changes to facilitate this, such as moving day events to evenings occasionally, to enable different age groups to participate.

We submitted a proposal to the Board regarding how to improve our marketing using our online tools, such as the website. One of the results of this was a revamped website with a message that we are 'More than just Sundays.'



## Lay Chaplaincy Team

*-Sharmila Khare, chair*

Lay Chaplains perform many types of rites of passage, but most often, weddings, memorials, and child naming/parent dedication services. They officiate these services primarily for people who are not associated with our congregation, but can serve our members as well. The Lay Chaplaincy Team / Ottawa Lay Chaplaincy Committee (LCC) is a joint endeavour of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and the Unitarian Fellowship of Ottawa.

In 2022, Lisa Boulay and Alex Campbell continued as Lay Chaplains in 2022. Guy Belleperche was appointed as an Ottawa Lay Chaplain at the May 2022 AGM of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. The Lay Chaplains continued to participate in training offered by the Canadian Unitarian Council and the Lay Chaplains Chats.

Together they officiated 32 memorials (including one held at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa), 1 weddings, and 1 child dedication. Very impressive service to the wider community! Lisa Boulay is under contract with Health Canada's Pastoral Care Services. In this role she provided ten services for military members who were interred at the National Military Cemetery and who requested either a non-denominational or Unitarian officiant.

After ten years of dedicated service, Bob Armstrong retired as chair of the Lay Chaplaincy Committee at the end of 2022. A huge thank you for his service. Bob continues his involvement with the Canadian Unitarian Council Lay Chaplaincy Committee.

This report has been prepared for both the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa.

## Meditation Gardens

*-Margaret Linton*

The Meditation Garden Team has the following mission: we nurture the web of life by maintaining the Gardens as an outdoor sanctuary which provides spiritual and physical peace and renewal for all; by building connections among humans, plants, wildlife, water and soil; and by celebrating the circle of life and death.

The Friends of the Meditation Gardens nurtures and maintains the North and South Gardens surrounded by the parking lot. The volunteer team of around 15 members; we tried (successfully) a new leadership model, with Susan Mellor and Margaret Linton doing admin and pairs of volunteers, for the period of a month, prioritizing the tasks to be undertaken throughout the month. Major garden decisions affecting the property are decided with the Property Team and the facilities manager, Lori Clarke.

The major project this year was refurbishing the gravel paths. The team ordered and paid the gravel, hired help and with volunteers distributed the gravel to the paths, then raked and pressed it in. One very moderately bench was bought (and it will be a short-lived bench), and 2 broken ones give to Ajashki to fix for their garden and a volunteer to rebuild for the garden (in progress). The wood rot in Brian's Reste and the bridge has been referred to Property Committee.

The usual garden work of weeding, pruning, watering and maintaining the paths, pond, and bird baths continued through the seasons. The ongoing focus was the effort to control the many invasive species in



the garden we are holding our own, and planting local species in their place. A last memorial planting was done.

The garden team is coordinating with Ajashki on the compost bins. Ajashki staff are turning and emptying, and putting food waste in; the garden team maintains the signs. Compost donated to us and Ajashki from a downtown high-rise composter is transported by Ajashki with our help.

Susan's spontaneity in displaying red dresses as a symbol of our recognition of MMIWG (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) on May 5 was appreciated by many; the Truth and Reconciliation group organized a sharing circle for that afternoon. The organic vegetable garden is maintained by and for Unitarian House. A permanent herb garden was established along with a wild garden strip as a pollinator attraction.

Financially, the meditation garden receives donations for memorial items, direct donations for our projects (none this year). Other expenses (bulbs, replacement plants, tools, gravel, markers, compost/soil improvements) are drawn an account for the funds account with plant sale fundraising from 8 years ago and previous year bake sales.

Plans for 2023 are to continue to maintain the garden, keep the invasive species under control, and add more pollinator friendly plants.

## Property Team

*-Ron Doyle*

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The Property Team has 6 regular members, Ron Doyle, Bill Van Iterson, Neville Grant, Patti Wunsch from the congregation and Jen Brennan and Lori Clarke from the staff. At this time, there is no leader. Ron and Bill have been sharing the duties. The Team oversees the operation and maintenance of the building and the campus.

Other than maintenance projects, such as the remediation of the deteriorating concrete on the building and the regular staining of sections of the wood, the major initiative completed was the installation of a projector and screen in Worship Hall. The Team also worked with the Environmental Action Working Group to complete the installation of a heat pump system in Fellowship Hall and assisted when required to help the Ajashki Garden Project. The Team works with funding provided through the Maintenance Reserve Fund and the Maintenance Project Fund. The building is 55 years old. Sufficient funding is required to maintain it. Unfortunately, proper reserves haven't been established and major projects have required special funding campaigns.

The major projects for next year are: the enhancement of the WIFI and audio - visual capacity of the building and depending on funding, the replacement of the railings around the patio.



## Right Relations Team (RRT)

*-Lisa Boulay And Marilen Gerber, Co- chairs*

The Right Relations Team assists the congregation and staff of the FirstU of Ottawa in fostering and maintaining harmonious relations within the congregation. The RRT mitigates conflict through education and training. RRT members may be called upon to consult re conflicts between individuals/groups.

### Highlights January-December 2022

- The RR Team is revising the information brochure to reflect our role of reminding members to refer to the Relational Covenant in times of conflict.
- The RRT met with the minister, Rev. Eric Meter, this past year to have his input and experience and to present our history and to discuss our role within the congregation.
- The RRT voted to remove the Mediation component from our role. If members require mediation, they would be referred to external resources. The relevant documents were updated to reflect this change (i.e. Conflict Resolution Policy and RRT terms of reference.)
- We discussed changing the name of the team over several meetings. It was decided to keep the Right Relation's Team name as the congregation is familiar with it.
- We decided to expand our educational role and will meet with various groups i.e. The Board of Directors, Shared Ministry, Welcoming Committee, and others,) in the fall to plan educational presentations for the congregation.
- We were referred one conflict situations last year which was handed informally by one team member and resolved. .
- The RR team continues to meet via Zoom during the extended Covid-19 pandemic.

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The RR team successfully met throughout the year, virtually by Zoom which improved our ability to have full attendance at meetings. We feel that we met our goals well. We continue to discuss RRTs role and to develop it with the support of our minister.

Rev. Eric Meter will act as a spiritual advisor in an ex officio role, since Rev. Ellen Bell is unable to continue in this capacity.

The RRT is planning further education (i.e. use of the bulletin board, presenting articles in the Spire and giving short presentations on the role of RRT and how to use the Relational Covenant as a guide.) We hope to present some information to congregants on topics of conflict resolution and respectful interpersonal communication. We will continue to be available to members or groups in the congregation if requested to consult re resolution of conflicts.

We also hope to discuss enlarging the Congregational Relational Covenant Banners and have them placed in a more visible place in the sanctuary.



## UU Connections Team (*formerly Denominational Affairs Team*)

*-Maury Prevost, chair*

Here is what we said in our plan for 2022: “The [UU Connections Team] will continue its mandate to connect our congregation and its members to UUs and their activities in Canada and around the world, especially through the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC). The work of the Team indirectly supports goals [G1, G2, G3, & G5 of the Strategic Plan]. We know that the CUC is not planning a national conference in 2022, but we will promote people in our congregation participating in other CUC or international UU events and training, some of which may be in-person again in 2022.

A highlight in 2022 was the Board’s decision to co-host in Ottawa, with the UU Fellowship of Ottawa, the CUC national events in May 2023, including the Symposium and CanUUdle youth event. The UU Connections Team played a role in coming to this decision and then establishing a separate Host Team to implement it. The Team also decided, at its May 2022 meeting, to change its name from the “Denominational Affairs Team” to the more descriptive “UU Connections Team”. The Team’s actual activities in 2022 aligned well with expected activities, especially with respect to providing people in our congregation with lots of information about CUC activities (through the eUU, Parkway Spire, and other channels) and to ensuring good FirstU representation in national events. Chuck Shields of our congregation became President of the CUC in May 2023 and Maury Prevost served as Chair of the CUC Nominating Committee.

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The focus and key accomplishment in 2023 will be hosting the CUC national events in May. The Team will also continue its usual activities to connect our congregation to the larger UU community in Canada and beyond. As noted above, the work of the Team supports Goals 1, 2, 3, and 5 of the Strategic Plan, and most directly Objective 9 of Goal 2, “Stronger links with other UUs domestically and internationally”.

## Welcome and Membership Team

*-Jane Lindsay*

The Welcome & Membership Team helps ensure FirstU’s sustained vitality by welcoming newcomers and congregants, supporting them to feel connected and engaged with our community and helping those who wish to do so to become members.

The team meets on an as-needs basis. It had 11 members in 2022. In addition to the team itself, there are about 17 additional congregants who volunteer as greeters at live services. In 2022, as for many years, the team was structured with one Chair /Team Lead and plus specific initiatives that vary from time to time, each led by one or two team members who volunteered for that specific initiative.

Intensified outreach by Greeters and Welcome Table volunteers to newcomers at live services; response to email inquiries about FirstU; conducting of the member application process; organization and delivery of one Introducing Ourselves event (online, April) for new members and interested visitors; organization and facilitation with Rev. Eric Meter of one Map Making program (online and live for several sessions May -June); assistance to the scrutineers for the 2022 annual and special congregational meetings; recruitment of a new Greeters Coordinator (Barb Ryan) who began in July); planning and delivery with the Men’s Breakfast Group of a highly successful Congregational BBQ (May).

W&M will continue to provide the ongoing services as or similar to the above. However, its Chair is going to explore with the team whether to restructure W&M in light of current volunteer preferences and team needs. The Chair and one team member will be on a Membership Task Force to recommend on such things as membership categories / meaning in a hybrid world, expectations of members, the relationship



between membership status and financial and volunteer time contributions and whether changes are needed to our governance tools. We also hope to finally, after many postponements, do a celebratory hybrid New Member welcome service and to do a Project Reconnect program of calls to members who have not engaged with us in the Covid years.

## Worship Associates

*-Lisa Boulay, chair*

The Worship Associate Team is comprised of 6 active members of the congregation. Our role is to assist and support the Minister during Sunday services.

During the summer months Bob Armstrong coordinates guest speakers for each service. Each Worship Associate is responsible for 1 to 3 services and takes the lead in supporting and facilitating the services including working with the guest speaker to develop the service, communicating with the Music Director regarding music selection for the service and ensuring that the service description and biography of the guest speaker is communicated to publications staff in order that the service can be promoted both within and beyond the congregation.

With the return to in-person worship the Worship Associates have been nimble in shifting from on-line zoom services and/or pre-recorded services to in-person services. In 2022 the Worship Associates Team met on a regular basis with the Congregation's Lead Minister Rev. Eric Meter to ensure the smooth transition back to in-person worship as well as to bring forward ideas and feedback to create inclusive and welcoming services.

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The Worship Associate Team have moved all scheduling, minute archives and order of service templates online on One Drive to ensure better communication within the team.

The Worship Associate team continues to meet with the Rev. Eric Meter every second month. We continue to assist and support the Minister in the delivery of Sunday Services and to build a robust Worship Associate Team.



*Rev Eric at the podium*





# Social Responsibility

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## Social Justice Action Network (SJAN)

*-Sherri Watson, chair*

SJAN is an informal collection of the leaders of the various action groups related to Social Justice. Currently there are approximately 9 members that attend regularly including our Minister and SJAN chairperson and finance specialist.

SJAN through our periodic meetings arranges coordination of the activities of the various action groups. It promotes communication, scheduling and ensures that overlap of activity is reduced. SJAN also organizes the sharing of the Social Justice funds in the Congregational Budget between the groups according to the priorities of all the groups.

SJAN continues to modify the membership and group structure with changing interests both individual and congregational.

Ajashki was welcomed at the end of the year as a new Action Group; an upgrade from the special project status which it has been for the last few years.

22 Global Justice and Poverty Action Groups were merged as the Social Justice Action Group. This new Action Group also took over the responsibilities for the ongoing Refugee program.

SJAN has a significant problem in 2023 of finding a new chairperson with such skills and personality as our past chair, Sherri Watson.

## Ajashki

*-Sharen Bowen, Ajashki Support Coordinator and Eva Berringer, Project Liaison*

Started as a pilot project in 2020, Ajashki is an Indigenous-led initiative which gives marginalized, gender diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth called Future Food Warriors opportunities to build employment skills and confidence through hands-on gardening and teachings on climate change, Indigenous culture and health and wellness. Created in response to Green Sanctuary's call for action on climate justice, Ajashki responds both to the congregation's commitment to action on climate change and to reconciliation. It is led by Kayoki Whiteduck, a young Algonquin Anishinaabe farmer and horticulturalist, and supported by volunteers who form a Circle of Support.

Ajashki's summer program which operates two days per week expanded in 2022 to include 7 Future Food Warriors, including 3 First Nations youth and 3 Inuit youth. The garden was extended and two movable raised beds were added. Three new rain barrels were installed and a new 'squirrel protector' was built over the main beds. In addition to the focus on gardening, Ajashki has expanded to include a lunch program with teachings on nutrition and food preparation as well as to focus on mental health and wellness based on the Seven Dimensions of Wellness - Youth Empowerment.



The winter program focuses on teachings about climate change and wellness and on maintaining the grow towers, the leafy green produce from which has proved popular with congregants.

In late October and early November 2022, circles were held to get feedback on what was working well, the challenges that exist and opportunities for moving forward. The results of these sessions will help Ajashki as it moves forward.

In addition to funding provided through the SJAN budget and donations from congregants, Ajashki was successful in obtaining grant funding from the Ottawa Community Foundation and the Indigenous People's Resilience Fund as well as a small grant from the ROOTS Community Fund specifically for the purchase of garden supplies. Approval of a grant from Crime Prevention Ottawa's SHINE: Youth Arts Micro grants was received in December, 2022. Ajashki is very thankful for the support from these organizations and from the congregation.

Ajashki's winter program will be expanded in 2023, thanks to funding through Shine, to include a focus on Future Food Warriors learning to become entrepreneurs in order to sell their art, including workshops on basket making, beading earrings, beading feathers, collage and Space FX (special effects). The grow towers and emphasis on climate change, health and wellness will continue with a growing focus on climate resilience. Subject to funding, the summer program will also be expanded to include more Future Food Warriors (youth participants) and it is hoped that an Indigenous co-leader can be brought on board.

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Ajashki will continue to foster partnerships both within the congregation (RE garden, shared composting with the Friends of the Meditation Garden, sharing circles and joint events with TRAG, JEAG, OrH, EAG) and outside, including continuing its relationship with the Parkdale Food Centre and with the ODAWA Native Friendship, Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre, the Inuuqatigit Centre (Connecting Inuit Youth Project) and Nature Canada (Work To Grow Program).



*In the Gardens*

## Environmental Action Group (EAG)

*-Mike Fletcher, chair*

The Environmental Action Group (EAG) continued its work as the leader of the congregational focus on climate change in 2023. Influencing, advising, and undertaking projects helped to advance the work to bring awareness about and action on the climate crisis.

Influencing was a major undertaking, and arguably, an area in which the EAG has found a groove. The EAG supported two sermons on climate change, contributed articles to the spire supported several climate protests. Some influencing was persistent and related to specific issues. The issue of phasing out natural gas generation in Ontario started to become an issue in 2021 and continued to be one throughout 2022. EAG members and members of the congregation at large were involved in opposing gas generation at public meetings and in other ways. Our work on this issue culminated in support and participation in a protest in November.

The EAG were also active in opposing other legislation, keeping the pressure on by always maintaining advocacy action and on the very impressive climate action webpage and "Unitarians for Climaction"



Facebook page. In late summer, the Province's Bill 23 created concern through its encouragement of sprawl and development on the Southern Ontario greenbelt and the EAG was vocal in opposing these developments.

The EAG often played an advisory role. This on several occasions to the form of discussions with congregants looking to undertake greening projects in their homes. It's encouraging to note that several congregants have gone on to install heat pumps and solar panels in their homes. Happy green energy to everyone taking these initiatives!

The EAG also played an advisory role in campus development. Early in the year several congregants gave advice to again ensure the development would be net zero and later in the year took part in a series of design charrettes.

A series of projects rounded out the EAG's 2022 work. Investigation on investments which had started in 2021, in 2022 led to a portion of church funds being invested in green energy. A series of small projects related to supply of seeds, and materials supported Ajashki. In late summer EAG contributed to and help support the installation of a heat pump, which also works as an air conditioner, into Fellowship Hall. This project, is an example of a decarbonisation project for the church building which FirstU will have to undertake in the years ahead to meet out climate commitments.

At the end of 2022, work was start of tasks for 2023. This includes work on emergencies preparedness and completing green sanctuary which will be an important living document for the congregation in the years ahead.

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## Truth and Reconciliation Action Group (TRAG)

*-Jan Andrews, chair*

TRAG's mission is to support reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, in the context of the conclusions and calls to action of such bodies as the TRC, MMIWG, Human Rights Tribunal, and Supreme Court. We do this through awareness-raising and education, fund-raising for and/or donating to selected Indigenous organizations on behalf of FirstU, participating as an ally in initiatives led by Indigenous people or organizations, and being advocates for systemic change.

Highlights include:

- May: Co-hosted an Earth Speaks Presentation on How to Create a Healing Forest with EAG (Goal: to build partnerships, to educate toward action)
- June: partnering with Unitarian House, TRAG co-hosted a talk by Gilbert Whiteduck (Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi) called "A Time of Sharing, A Time of Connection" which was very well attended. (Goal: to increase awareness, understanding)
- October: TRAG partnered with Ajashki to host a very successful Thanksgiving Harvest Soup Event outside on the terrace after service (Goal: to build partnerships in community)
- Oct 22-Apr 23: Jointly with UUFO, TRAG offered the "Uncolonizing Focus Group" to 11 participants based on the CUC model – 6 monthly sessions (Goal: to educate and deepen understanding)
- held Sharing Circles on Land Acknowledgements (Mar 20); MMIWG (May 5) (Goal: to deepen our understanding and build community)
- Arranged for a painting by Keith Yach to represent MMIWG, gifted to FirstU
- Participated in the Campus Planning Development by building relationships with OAHS
- Marched with Albert Dumont to support changing the name of the western parkway (Goal: be an ally to Indigenous peoples) and attended the National Day of Remembrance (Sep 30) events



- Reviewed the TRC Calls to Action and the MMIW Report to identify which ones might apply to FirstU. (Goal: educate toward action)
- Communications: January - article in the Parkway Spire “Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation”; Sep – created a TRAG Facebook page to share info and events; Ongoing: update website and put announcements of community events in eJU (Goal: to increase awareness, educate)

TRAG put forward a number of activities in our work plan for 2023, however, our capacity to follow through is limited due to other commitments and busy lives, so we have decided to scale back. Our focus will be closer to home – continuing to foster good relationships with Ajashki and OAHS through offering sharing circles and occasional joint events like the fall harvest meal. We also hope to play a role in building positive relationships with our neighbours (on campus and off), as the OAHS housing project moves forward.

## Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG)

- Linda Goonewardene and Johnnie Gall, Co-Chairs

The Mental Health Support and Action Group serves within the Social Justice Action Network and has eight active members. We offer a listening presence and mutual support for those of us who live with mental illness and as caregivers, thereby upholding the inherent worth and dignity of every person – affirming equity, compassion, and acceptance of one another just as we are. We also engage in actions designed to address mental health challenges in the congregation and the broader society, including mental illness, addiction, dementia, and disaster anxiety, e.g., climate change, war, and pandemics. We continue to support Ancoura and its mission of creating homes and community for mental health.

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We accomplished most of our goals for 2022:

- We offered a listening presence and mutual support during our monthly Zoom meetings.
- MHSAG continued to support Ancoura through our annual congregational donation of \$1000 and the volunteer efforts of our members.
- We contributed to the Campus Planning housing initiative, stressing the importance of there being a significant number of deeply affordable units in the proposed development.
- MHSAG represented FirstU at the Working on Wellness (WOW) Festival in September. This festival brought together substance use, mental, and physical health communities under one umbrella. We teamed up with Ancoura to showcase both our congregational and community services to support those having mental health challenges.
- In the lead-up to the October Ottawa election, we offered congregants a letter template to write to councillors and candidates to advocate for affordable and accessible housing with mental health supports.
- Observing Mental Illness Awareness Week in October, members participated in a worship service, an occasion to share MHSAG’s mandates and how we provide mutual support for each other.
- We updated our mandates and brochure.

MHSAG will continue its commitment to social justice and an energized spirituality through mutual support at our meetings, education, and advocacy. In 2023, we plan to

- explore the book, *Held – Showing up for each other’s mental health*, by Rev. Barbara Meyers;
- continue to support Ancoura, welcoming them to our FirstU community and MHSAG meetings;
- sponsor and organize a Mental Health First Aid course in April;
- propose a *Safe Congregations* policy to the Board for congregants and people in mental health distress to feel safe and supported at FirstU;



- represent FirstU and participate with Ancoura at the September WOW Festival;
- continue to participate in worship services to sensitize congregants about the needs, realities, and stigma of those of us living with and caring for people having mental health challenges; and
- work closely with our SRC action group partners to further social responsibility in our congregation and community.

## Unitarian GoGos

*-Sheila Green*

Unitarian GoGos are a group of about 20 congregants and community members who work together to turn the tide of HIV/AIDS in sub Saharan Africa in collaboration with the Stephen Lewis Foundation. We are one of approximately 20 Granny groups in Ottawa. We meet each month to learn about supporting and augmenting the voices of African grandmothers who are raising their orphaned grandchildren. We organize a number of fundraising activities throughout the year to support grassroots organizations in sub Saharan Africa. Our work contributes to the vision, purpose and mission of First Unitarian to support the global right to food and health security for all. It also contributes to supporting, protecting and empowering young women, senior women and members of the LGBTQ 2+ communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Our activities throughout the past year included our annual plant sale at the church in May; a 3 day sale of donated plants from members, the local community and another local Granny group who held their plant sale on Saturday only and donated the remaining plants to our sale. We also sold baked goods. It was very well attended. We also invited a local environmental organization to give away free trees at the event. The remaining plants were given to the Ajashki group who planted them behind the church. We have arranged to donate our remaining plants again to Ajashki.

We sold tickets to a play for a local Theatre group for a 50% share of the ticket price. The group had formerly worked out of Perth but has moved to Ottawa.

We had our annual Biagio's luncheon in early September that also had a Silent Auction attached to it. We had a good turnout including a lot of wasps that didn't make a donation but stung a number of people!! We plan to move back inside for this coming year and back to an evening meal.

We hosted a Meeting for all 20 Granny groups in Ottawa with speakers from The Stephen Lewis Foundation, The founder of another successful charity 10,000 Girls, and women from sub Saharan Africa who are leaders in their communities and local Grassroots organizations. It was well attended and open to the congregation and the public. Our last event of the year was our annual bake sale in December which was well attended by members of the congregation and local community and therefore a fundraising success.

For this coming year we will continue with our annual fundraising events. We will also host a new fundraising activity at First Unitarian with another Granny group (One World Grannies), called Stories and Songs of the Solstice in June. The 3 Rivers choir will be participating and there will be a variety of storytellers including African and Indigenous storytellers. Music, appetizers and dessert will be available at the beginning of the event and during intermission.

I don't feel able to comment on how our group can contribute to the 5 year strategic plan at this time but will discuss it with the GoGos at our upcoming monthly meeting.

