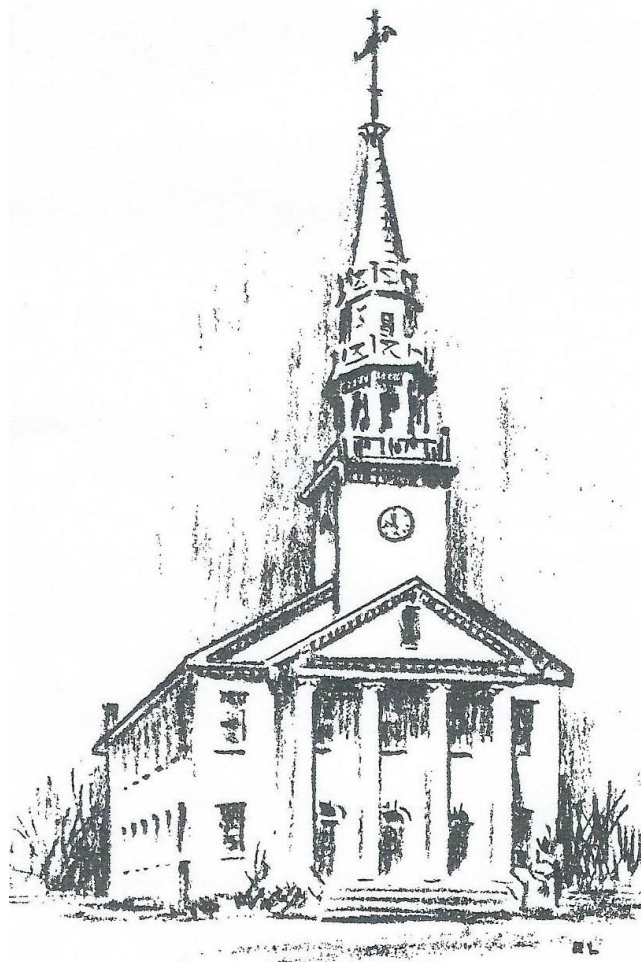


# **2022 Annual Report**

**Annual Meeting  
January 29, 2023**



**First Congregational Church  
Cheshire, Connecticut**



**First Congregational Church**  
**An Open and Affirming, Green Congregation of the United Church of Christ**  
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**[www.firstcheshire.org](http://www.firstcheshire.org)**

**CHURCH STAFF**

Senior Minister	The Reverend Dr. James Campbell
Associate Minister	The Reverend Alison McCaffrey
Music Director	Joseph D'Eugenio
Director for Christian Education	Dawn Marchand
Director of Youth Ministry	Todd Skrzyniarz
Church Administrator	Christine Blois
Sexton	Kevin Ross

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## CHURCH COUNCIL PRESIDENT

*First Church is a welcoming and vibrant congregation seeking to deepen our faith and follow Jesus' example, pursuing justice and caring for each other, the community, and our world.* Our vision: it is where we started the year in the State of the Church during last year's Annual Meeting, and it seems a perfect place to end this year as we reflect on our journey of the year past.

How would we have made it through this year without a deepened faith? While better than when we were in the midst of COVID, it was still a year when trusting our faith and caring for each other felt like the most viable approach toward envisioning a new way of being. As we returned to church in more robust ways and saw more glimmers of "normalcy," it was also quite clear that we were not going to return to traditions of the past as if COVID had not come. We recognized that we are on a new journey to discover the paths that First Church will take to live into our vision. It hasn't been without some bumps in the road, and sometimes it felt like we were on a roundabout without having a map to tell us which road to get off, but together we have begun to find our way.

This Annual Report will highlight incredible blessings and a few challenges of the church over the last year. Reflecting back to the early months of the year, we were quite uncertain about whether we could reengage the membership in ways that had once been taken for granted. We were still finding our comfort with being back together and we lacked volunteers to fill the ongoing needs of the church. Church Council asked Ministry Groups to come together to support major activities of the church to ensure their success while also maintain the work of their individual Ministry Groups. We could not be more grateful for their response to this call for action.

We realized major successes that were beacons of light on our journey. We could feel God's spirit and love in our seasons of Lent, Easter, Advent and Christmas, presented with incredible thought, intentionality and preparation by our amazing and tireless staff. There was a new spark of energy with the highly anticipated return of Fellowship Hours. We reengaged the Cheshire community with an amazing Strawberry Festival. We kicked off the fall with a celebratory Welcome Sunday. We wrapped up the year with a fun and festive Christmas Fair. While each may have looked a bit different than we remembered, they were robust achievements because the congregation came together to make them so. And they provided a reminder of what we loved before the pandemic that was not lost.

There are other high moments worth noting. We had the joy of celebrating Alison's 20 years of ministry. What would First Church be without the compassion, creativity and faith leadership of our Associate Minister?! We confirmed thirteen of our youth in a beautiful worship service in June. The young people are the future of our church and we are blessed to have these active teens as a part of our congregation. And, what fun it was to kick off the 300th anniversary with a visit by Samuel Hall. Much more to come as we anticipate the full celebration of 300 years of First Church over the next couple of years.

The reports that follow in this Annual Report will detail many other programs, ministries, and ways we have engaged the congregation, the Cheshire community and the wider world. The work of each of these parts of the church is so important that we hope you will carefully read how they have been investing their time and energy on behalf of all of us. These reports reflect countless hours invested by dozens of members of our church, including our church staff. We hope you know how much your church leadership values the ways that each of you steps up as needed and assumes your opportunity to make a difference through a ministry group, action team, committee, or other volunteer moment.

We are also pleased to share that the financial health of our church looks bright thanks to the incredible generosity of our congregation, the Spirit-led work of the Generosity Team, and the diligence of our church treasurers. As our financial report shows, we realized 101% of pledges last year and ended the year in the black, not having to use the majority of the reserve funds we set aside in case of a shortfall. Thank you for your investment in our church in the year past and the year to come.

While there is much to celebrate on our journey, we also had some delays. We have not made the progress we had hoped to fully realize the viability of the new governance model. We have lived into it in a way that helps us know what is beginning to work, what needs tweaking or enhancement, and what might need some rethinking. We began to make some changes this year, with the valuable addition of a new Membership Ministry Group, for example, and we have a plan for the year ahead that will prepare us for a decision by the 2024 Annual Meeting. You will hear more about this at the Annual Meeting.

The changes in our world and our church have also brought attention to other needs and opportunities. In last year's Annual Report, James introduced us to Project 2030. Church Council continues to place meaningful emphasis on these areas of membership growth, campus use that supports growth, endowment growth and staffing that supports growth. As we chart our future in the year ahead, we will pick up the pace in our intentionality around this work.

We end this report with a huge THANK YOU! It took each of you doing your part to bring us to the place we are today. While we are still imagining the future and we know that the only constant is change, the path feels a bit more lighted now. There are so many reasons to feel optimistic and hopeful as we bring one church year to a close and begin a new one. We are grateful for your trust in our leadership this year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tracy Tyree, President  
Karen Helene, President Elect  
Andy Irish, Past President

## **SENIOR MINISTER**

***“Behold, I will do a new thing!”***

Isaiah 43:19a

Each Sunday during the announcements, I catch myself just before I reference COVID in the past tense. In so many ways, life seems to have returned to normal. And truth be told, normal is what I want for this congregation. I want things to be just as they were before March 2020.

But each Sunday, I remember that this experience is far from over. Folks in our community continue to get sick. Worshipers continue to wear masks and social distance in the sanctuary. Some of our folks have never returned to in-person worship, joining us online instead. And still have simply drifted away. This life-changing event is not over. Instead, we are squarely planted in a liminal space – neither here nor there.

Liminal spaces are not my favorite place to be. I am not a fan of ambiguity when it comes to my goals and measuring success. But I also know from my own experience of life and faith, that God is often found in these in-between places of our lives. That's where new things are born. That's where Resurrection happens.

The Resurrection was not a resuscitation of the way things used to be. And it wasn't the future heavenly glory, either. It was somewhere in between... and something completely new and unexpected.

The Resurrection is an apt metaphor for what we are experiencing as a congregation. We are still First Congregational Church of Cheshire, but our forms have changed. The old has passed away. Something new is rising.

With that in mind, I offer some examples of the Resurrection among us. This list is by no means comprehensive. Neither should these examples invite comparison to what used to be. Instead, these are reminders that even "in between", God is still at work.

### **Rebounding Worship**

Since reopening in fits and starts, Sunday worship participation has continued to rebound. Each week, more of our old members are resurfacing, while hardly a Sunday passes without visitors in worship. Vibrant programs of music, intergenerational programs, relevant sermons, warm times of sharing and prayer – these are hallmarks of worship at First Church.

In addition to the Sunday service, here are some of the other vibrant worship opportunities that were offered this past year:

- Taizé worship
- Quarterly Communion Service at Elim Park
- Lenten Vespers
- Ashes to Go on Ash Wednesday
- Communion on the Road on Maundy Thursday
- "Cross Walk" on Good Friday
- Outdoor Pet Blessing in October
- Advent Vespers
- Early Morning Advent Communion

### **Very Strong Financial Support**

This year's Generosity Campaign was by far the most successful stewardship effort of my tenure. I was privileged to recruit and serve alongside a talented team of people dedicated to doing generosity/stewardship in a new way. As of this writing, the congregation increased its giving by more than \$93,000 over last year. This is an *incredible* accomplishment, showing the strength and faith of the congregation – and real hope for our future.

### **Stable Membership**

Despite COVID, steep declines in religious life in America, and other significant factors, membership at First Church is stable, even showing a slight increase (+13) in 2022. While we continue to work diligently and creatively for more significant increases in membership, we are grateful for a stability that many other congregations do not currently enjoy.

## **Engaged Staff**

During the past year, the church staff continued to do their ministry in a liminal space - innovating, creating, and working hard to engage their reemerging constituencies in the vision of the congregation. The result is that we have seen increased engagement across all areas of the church's life, in large part because of the dedication and ingenuity of the church's staff.

## **Professional Communications/Social Media Strategy**

First Church is an amazing place – and *we need to let the world know!* This year's budget includes a line item to hire a communications/social media professional to help us spread the word. In addition, a member of the congregation, with relevant expertise, has volunteered to help the church with a broad communications plan as a first step. Because of my own interests and background in marketing, I will be working closely with these folks.

## **Project 2030 Update**

I remain very focused Project 2030 (see last year's annual report) and am happy to report that some progress has been made toward addressing some of the Project's goals. The four areas of focus are:

1. Membership Growth
2. Campus Use that Supports Growth
3. Endowment Growth
4. Staffing that Supports Growth

## **Conclusion**

After the Resurrection, the disciples kept meeting Jesus *on the road*. And that's still where the Lord is – in that liminal space, always out in front of us, always calling us to something new. It is my sincere prayer that we will always follow.

Respectfully Submitted,  
The Rev. Dr. James Campbell, Senior Minister

## **ASSOCIATE MINISTER**

I begin with heartfelt thanks for the gracious celebration of my 20 years here at First Church, held in April. As one called to serve in a covenantal relationship, this was a mutual celebration. So I lift you up and give thanks for you: all with whom I have had the privilege of walking and shepherding in the way of Jesus. I am forever thankful.

In last year's report, I noted how the time-out- of- time nature of Covid offered the unique opportunity to step back and discern which ministries and events have accomplished their purpose and can be let go of and which to continue, perhaps in a new way. In the course of 2022, it became clear that the Dinner Bell ministry was one to let go of. The tremendous amount of volunteer effort to organize and successfully carry this out in these Covid-uncertain times, helped us to put this idea aside. Likewise, at the conclusion of five weekly Lenten Vespers services, we assessed that the original Covid- driven need for gathering outside for worship on Lenten Sundays had been met.



Along with churches of all sizes and traditions, early in 2022 we identified the challenge of engaging/ re-engaging our members in the work of being church in a Covid-safe manner. With great excitement, in May we were able to restart Communion on the Road, bringing the consecrated elements from the Communion Table to those confined at home or residents of rehab centers on the first Sunday of each month. Also, the Parish Care Coordinators, Karen Gravino, Grace Knipe and Martha Lape were able to resume their in person meetings on Tuesday afternoons. In September, Caring Ministry Group members Diane Albro and Mary Strauss and I relaunched the Visitation Ministry, organizing and rebuilding this 1-1 ministry of friendly visiting. With Joey Ekberg, I led a Greeter Ministry Gathering on Sunday, Nov 20 after worship to recast the vision of hospitality and welcome. One outcome is the renaming of the Kiosk to “Welcome Desk” and locating it in the parlor on Sunday mornings, staffed by a Greeter before and after worship.

Other collaborations yielded intergenerational fun. For Lent, Dawn Marchand and I collaborated to offer Lenten Pen Pals, where for five weeks, 21 pairs of elementary age children and adults sent 5 letters back and forth, responding to questions posed about faith topics and life experiences, culminating with a meet up after worship in May. For the first Sunday in Advent, Caring Ministry, Faith Formation and Worship Ministry collaborated to offer The Advent Event for all ages to prepare our Sanctuary, Parish Hall and common spaces with signs and symbols of Advent. For the Festival of Carols, I once again recruited readers of various age groups, and met with them individually to prepare to read the lessons in this annual event.

Worship services beyond Sunday morning offered opportunities to be together in new ways. James and I planned and co-lead the Pet Blessing in October, Ashes on the Way and Ash Wednesday evening service and an early morning Maundy Thursday “Communion on the Way.” Maundy Thursday evening saw the sanctuary transformed into a dinner space where we worshiped while sharing an agape meal while viewing the “Remember Me” slide show, created from over 50 member submitted photos of scenes/ moments that reminded them of Jesus and his ministry.

I once again planned and led the Quiet Christmas Service for those who grieve with Pastor James and Dawn Marchand. This service continues to minister to our wider community as well as to our members who live with losses of many kinds. Once again, the beautiful prayer shawls made by the Caring Crafts group graced the pews, offering a visual and tangible embrace to all who attend.

Members also took part helping to artfully stage worship. In addition to hanging the Advent starts, church members hand-decorated and painted rocks that then lined the curb/ sidewalk for our Palm Sunday Processional. For Easter, 500 additional folded butterflies went into the hands of the congregation for decoration. 1500 butterflies enhanced Easter Morning services. In the weeks after, a Butterfly Migration Action Team gathered to help take them down. This team regathered to hang the Flames of Pentecost.

In May our church hosted the Association’s Spring Meeting with guest speaker SNEUCC Minister for Environmental and Economic Justice, Rev. Emma Brewer- Wallin, who spoke on the topic of Green churches. Church member Anne McNulty has since offered to speak with any New Haven Association church seeking how to become greener.

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I continued to lead/ offer small groups:

Bible 101 met on November 30. The participants expressed interest in continuing to meet. We are now Bible 101: Genesis, meeting mostly weekly on Wednesday evenings.

In coordination with the Confirmation schedule, the 2021-22 Confirmation Parent's Group met for discussions and to enthusiastically organizing an offsite post-rehearsal brunch.

I continue to facilitate the Prayer-Net Prayer Ministry Group, a confidential prayer ministry for anyone in need of prayer, involving some 25 pray-ers who offer to pray for the needs requested.

One other important small group I led is the Local Church Discernment Committee, whose members were Pastor James, Marcia Dodd, Tim Hart, Karen Helene, and Jack Sellati. As organizer of this team, I am very proud of our work. As the LCDC, we exist to walk with anyone who is exploring a call to ordained ministry or even wonders if God might be calling them. This year saw us finish our discernment journey with church member, Jordan Rebholz, which required many hours of meetings, prayer, and reflection, most especially around Jordan's Ordination paper. Jordan passed her ordination interview and had a successful Ecclesiastical Council and was ordained at Asylum Hill Congregation Church, where she had been called in 2020 as Associate Minister for Early Life. Marcia Dodd and I both took part in her ordination service. I thank our team members for their extraordinary and faithful dedication to this ministry.

In addition to my leadership in these groups, each month I attended Church Council meetings and served as staff member to the Caring, Worship, Faith Formation, and Outreach Ministry Groups.

One new opportunity to work with our wider Cheshire community arose this summer. After the Uvalde School shootings, James and I wondered aloud about what we could do in response. At the same time, St. Peters Episcopal was asking the same question. We were able to join together along with Temple Beth David and other community groups to sponsor Swords into Plowshares educational event at Boulder Knoll Community Farm. Swords into Plowshares is a national program that works with local police departments to sponsor gun-buy back events and then turns the firearms into garden tools and jewelry. Working together, and with the Cheshire Police Department, our Outreach Ministry Group contributed funds toward a first ever gun buy-back / gun surrender event in Cheshire, Saturday, Nov 19, where 90 guns were turned in, half coming from Cheshire, half from surrounding towns.

The 300th Anniversary Celebration Project continues its good work: Co-Chair Chris Fitzmaurice and I are joined by Joey Ekberg, Karen Gravino, Martha Lape, Christine Pittsley, Robin Sellati, Martha Triplett Strollo, Dean Warburton and James Campbell.

We chose Jeremiah 17:7-8a to guide our work: "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit."

Our tag line is: "First Church: Rooted and Growing." We created a logo:



Celebration Sunday is December 8, 2024, with the premiere of a commissioned hymn by Joe D'Eugenio.

Church member and retired clergy, Dean Warburton has joined our team to help us plan and lead a Capital Campaign.

We conducted Blue Sky conversations and collated the results around different categories as the basis of upcoming Focus Groups for the future Capital Campaign.

We held our first Focus Group with our members who reside at Elim Park.

At the Strawberry Festival we gave away 300th Anniversary water bottles and sold baseball caps. James and I alternated to give sanctuary tours every hour on the hour, which we both felt were well received. Darby Bronson helped design our new First Church T-Shirts featuring the logo; these have been sold on Sundays and at the Christmas Fair.

The Rev. Samuel Hall “visited” our December 11 worship service to mark the granting of permission from the Wallingford Church to hold our own services.

Professional development opportunities included attending the week-long Festival of Homiletics in Denver. I also took part in a year-long Affinity Group sponsored by our Southern New England Conference.

In December I concluded a 5-year term as Moderator of our New Haven Association of Churches. In this role I oversaw the work of the association, led the Executive Committee in its regular meetings and the twice-yearly Association meetings. I attended a portion of the monthly Committee on Ministry meetings, officiated at Ordinations and Installations, and moderated Ecclesiastical Councils. Thank you for your support of my work serving the wider church, for over 16 years in various roles.

In all things, I give thanks to God for this call privilege to serve this congregation and to serv alongside my colleagues on staff, with dedicated lay leaders, with and among you all.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Rev. Alison McCaffrey, Associate Minister

## **MUSIC DIRECTOR**

January 2022 began with excitement around plans for worship services and spring events that were to materialize during the seasons of Epiphany and Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. After the December holiday season, we emerged from what was the latest spike of Covid that challenged our enthusiasm and resolve.

The Epiphany season reengaged our Chancel Choir to regain momentum learning music in rehearsals and worship services throughout the winter. By time Ash Wednesday arrived, there was hope that our Lenten journey would be unencumbered by the affects of the pandemic. Fortunately, this was the case, and going forward, we held weekly Lenten vespers services outdoors with music on Sunday afternoons. Bi-monthly Taize services with student minister, Oliver Mesmer, continued on Wednesday evenings until his departure in May, which was the end of his academic school year.

Palm Sunday, Holy week, and Easter worship services were robust and triumphantly celebrated Christ the Redeemer as in the years before the pandemic with the singing of hymns, anthems, psalms, chants, and song of praise. Our congregants were once again moved and inspired by the sounds of our mighty Aeolian-Skinner organ and trumpets heralding “He is risen. Alleluia!”

Our church hosted several musical events to encourage those creating music and those wishing to be inspired by it as outreach. These events included a concert given by a visiting collegiate chamber choir from Colgate University; a concert given by Elm City Girls’ Choir for family, friends, and the community; and later in June, a community outreach event featuring Ukrainian music to support the Ukrainian people and “Vets without Borders” in response to the outbreak of the war on Ukraine.

Summer music ensued in both the sanctuary and parish hall with a variety of musical offerings from members of our congregation each week. Guest musicians and friends from outside of our congregation also shared their musical talents during several summer worship services. Musical research, calendaring, and planning for the 2022 - 2023 program year commenced.

As the fall approached, a new theme and structure for our music program - as outlined below - was adopted by the church council to help engage and inspire more diversity of music and participants:

### Being a Musical Congregation

As we begin a new program year, here are the many ways everyone in our congregation participates in our church’s music:

*As choir members ...*

We form our Chancel Choir to rehearse weekly and sing anthems and lead hymn singing during worship

*As church members, students, children, and families ...*

We join together as “Music with Friends” to prepare simple songs with our Music Director to sing during worship several times a year

*As musicians and talented soloists ...*

We sing solos and play instruments during worship and for special services and events

*As church school kids ...*

We sing songs as part of our Sunday morning activities, have singalongs with our Music Director, and sing in worship

*As middle and high school students ...*

We gather with our Music Director on Sunday evenings to sing about God’s love

*As congregants ...*

We sing hymns, refrains, and songs in worship to deepen our faith and further express lessons learned from scripture

Welcome Sunday in September started the program year off strong. The worship service included full-on musical diversity and singing by the choir, congregation, soloists, and trumpets. And, swiftly following in the weeks afterwards, the new structure for the music program began to take root and bear fruit.

Some of the results throughout the fall into the Advent season included several new members joining the choir; more than a dozen people forming “Music with Friends” which became a monthly occurrence; children sang in worship during Advent and on Christmas eve; and middle and high school students were exposed to singing and music for the first time since well before the pandemic. Our congregation learned new service music and more hymns, and experienced some teaching moments at the start of worship in preparation. Our choir, congregation, and those who participated in “Music with Friends” prepared more world music than ever before, including praise music of various cultures and indigenous people everywhere. The Chancel Choir led congregational singing from the chancel area nearly every week, instead of from the choir loft, to more effectively support those worshipping both aurally and visually.

In November, Memorial Music Sunday offered the music of Brahms, Mozart, and Vaughan Williams to comfort those in attendance. The Chancel Choir included guest singers from GMChorale (The Greater Middletown Chorale) and partnered musically with violinist, Christa Berezowskyj. Our annual Festival of Carols in December was attended by more than 365 people who joined in singing traditional Christmas carols and listening to choral anthems and scripture lessons to experience the Christmas story. Additional funding to support the music program was generated from both of these events. Significant efforts to market and promote both Memorial Music Sunday and Festival of Carols through newspapers, calendar postings, and social media occurred.

The Advent and Christmas seasons’ worship offerings were very full with four Sunday morning Advent worship services, a “Quiet Christmas” service, three Christmas eve services, and one service on Christmas morning. Each service included a rich tapestry of Advent and Christmas repertoire for choir, organ, instruments, and soloists. As throughout the year, services included music that was crafted specifically for our diverse talents, musical skills, and space. Music was comprised of special musical arrangements, improvisations, and thoughtfully selected repertoire.

On behalf of those in our music program, I am ever grateful to the ongoing efforts of our professional musicians on staff, and in our choir. Their leadership and guidance are core to our music program’s sustainability, evolution, and growth. Melissa Clark serves our congregation faithfully with her many gifts and expertise as Music Assistant, soloist, section leader, teacher, and cantor. Sarah Himmelstein graciously serves as section leader, soloist, and cantor. Robin Sellati and Jack Sellati serve as choir members, soloists, cantors, and song leaders. Catherine Stover generously serves as a choir member, instrumentalist, music engraver, and administrative support. I am grateful for the continued support of Joan Benedetto and her ongoing administrative efforts in helping to manage our choir’s activities, and to Jane Bower for maintaining the church’s music library. I give thanks to Joey Ekberg, choir member and chairperson of our Worship Ministry Group, for all of her work and leadership, and for those who served on the WMG and action teams established to support the many services and events that occurred throughout the year. Colleagues and keyboardists, Irina Zayaruzny and Michael McCarthy, participate regularly with our choir, soloists, and clergy, and are there to support our program whenever I am absent. Lastly, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and admiration for our exceptional Chancel Choir who continue to share their collective gifts that inspire through their voices and steadfast dedication.

In closing, *Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises!*  
(Psalm 98:4)

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joseph D’Eugenio, Director of Music

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DIRECTOR

*Faith Formation is our journey to knowing God. A journey shaped, in part, by the insight, knowledge and experiences gained through participation in Church School, Worship, church centered Service activities, and Fellowship.*

2022 began with a surge in Covid cases that necessitated a return to Zoom Church School. In February, we restarted in-person Church School but also offered Zoom Church School for those who were not comfortable returning to the building. During Lent Church School explored how Jesus' teachings can help us in our everyday lives, and continued the tradition of creating Easter cards for older church members who are homebound. Outside of Church School, children were invited to participate in a *Lenten Pen Pal Project* where they were paired with an adult church member and exchanged a series of letters on pre-selected topics. Eighteen children participated and wonderful intergenerational bonds were formed!

In an effort to engage families with children more fully in Holy Week we created an experiential Good Friday worship opportunity called *Walking with Jesus*, that used activities to gently tell the story of Jesus' death. On Easter Sunday the children remained in Worship to participate in the joyous celebration of resurrection, that was immediately followed by an Easter Egg Hunt! We finally said goodbye to Zoom Church School at the end of April and set our sights on Summer with an all church outing to a *Yard Goats* baseball game. Then on May 1st our Church School participated in a wonderful *Creation Care Interfaith Sunday School* event at Temple Beth David where they made "Turtle Crossing" signs that were installed all over town. The program year culminated with the children staying in Worship on Pentecost to witness the rite of Confirmation that marks a major faith formation milestone for youth in our church, and on the following Sunday, creating and distributing "Thank You" cards to our wonderful Church School volunteers.

Church School participation always diminishes in the summer but in 2022 the drop was steep. Once school ended it was like a magician waved their wand and "poof" everyone disappeared. Church School was reduced to a handful of kids and summer fun events (*Games on the Green*, and an *Ice Cream Social*), that were popular in the past, fell flat. Although a bit surprising, we were buoyed by the strong participation in our *Annual Backpack Drive* and eventually discerned that families were busy making up for time lost to the pandemic. So we set our sights on fall re-engagement, and (due to the need for a new floor in our church school hallway), on revamping Whiting House into program space for Church School.

The Sunday before *Welcome Sunday* we unofficially "kicked off" the Church School program year with an outdoor scavenger hunt that provided a fun way for the kids and incoming Church School volunteers to get acquainted. On *Welcome Sunday* the children stayed in Worship and afterwards everyone had fun playing games and eating ice cream at the picnic. The following two Sundays Church School focused on preparing for, and participating in *World Communion Sunday*. After that we devoted six weeks to exploring what it means to "Practice Generosity." We found Whiting House to be a wonderful setting for the types of discussions and activities that supported this curriculum, which included choosing an *Act of Generosity* to share with the congregation. With Halloween approaching, the kids loved the idea of reversing the traditional roles of costumed children receiving "treats" from adults, and worked hard to create a beautiful "treat" to give to adults during their costume parade in fellowship on October 30. We finished our "Generosity" curriculum just before Thanksgiving and turned towards Advent and the excitement of preparing for Christmas. On the first Sunday of Advent children decorated the Christmas Tree in Parish Hall, made stars for the Sanctuary, and created Mosaic Advent Candles for the Faith Formation bulletin board during the Advent preparation event. In Church School we explored ways to share Hope, Peace, Joy and Love with others. The kids made beautiful cards for older church members,

and our *Stepping Stones* 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade youth group, and their families, spent a snowy evening traveling around town singing Christmas carols and spreading holiday cheer at the homes of 6 church members. In addition to all of this, over 20 children said “yes” to taking part in an Advent Play! The children and their families committed wholeheartedly to this endeavor and the result was wonderful! The children shared an uplifting story about God’s Love with the congregation, but just as importantly, new friendships were made and relationships deepened. The program year ended at the 5:00 Christmas Eve worship when 10 special guest stars from our congregation helped to tell the story of Jesus’ birth with joy and laughter.

In Church School on Epiphany Sunday we chose guiding words for 2023. I choose “Invite” as a reminder to seek ways to expand “welcome” into “invitation” by offering programs and events that invite deeper engagement and connection among our children and families, and also inspires them to invite others to come join us.

Respectfully Submitted  
Dawn Marchand, Christian Education Director

## **YOUTH MINISTRY DIRECTOR**

The 2022 calendar year started with virtual youth group while the church remained closed during the winter Covid surge. Once reopened, we began to have in-person meetings throughout the rest of the year.

Food seemed to be our theme for this past year. Our middle school group collected food items around the Super Bowl. The middle and high school groups volunteered at the CT Foodshare in Wallingford both during their winter break as well as on a number of Fridays throughout the summer.

Some of the ways our teens participated in the life of the church include: leading Lenten vespers, volunteering at the Strawberry festival, and helping Dawn with church school.

I enjoyed organizing and attending the Yard Goats game with over 60 of our church members and friends on April 24th.

We had 13 high school teens participate in confirmation in 2022. Our May retreat to Killam’s Point in Branford included a high and low ropes challenge course and time by the water to prepare for Confirmation Sunday on June 5th.

In early May, I had an opportunity to attend a workshop at Yale Divinity School about innovation in youth ministry. The workshop sparked some ideas which led to a new youth group schedule for the fall. During the first Sunday of the month our middle and high school teens worked in groups to compete in “Cheshire Top Chef”. Volunteer adults helped lead the small groups of teens to hop, cook, and return to the church where a panel of judges would blindly taste test and score each item. The second Sunday of the month had us focusing on a specific theme. Some of these included personal goal setting and active listening. The third Sunday/weekend of the month had a service or fellowship focus. In November, 26 teens and family members served at Christian Community Action and helped assemble some of the other 2000 meals that CCA distributes. In December we had our Middle and High School Christmas party.

During the summer I had an opportunity to serve with Kirsten Sullivan, Jack Sellati, and James Leathem at the Ronald McDonald House in New Haven. The Ronald McDonald House allows families with young children to stay free of charge while the children receive care at Yale. We were able to make a hot meal for those families. Kirsten, James, Jack, and I rotate each month in taking a group of teens to

the Ronald McDonald house on the fourth Sunday of every month. Groups made a baked potato bar, lasagna dinner, and a lemon chicken dish. This ministry will continue on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month.

I am thankful for our students and their engagement throughout the year. I am grateful for our adult volunteers, church staff, and our congregation that supports and encourages our students.

Respectfully submitted  
Todd Skrzyniarz, Youth Director

## **WORSHIP MINISTRY**

The Worship Ministry Group has had a rich and productive year contributing to congregational life and ministry at First Church as outlined below. The members of the WMG were vital to all aspects of these events, helping in a variety of ways, often behind the scenes.

The vagaries of COVID again called on the ability of the staff and congregation to be nimble and creative. The new omicron variant emerged and required that we once again shut down in-person worship as of January 2. Services were aired on Facebook and the church website. The choir could not meet for rehearsals, but Joe and Melissa carried on our music ministry. By February 6, we were able to resume in-person worship with everyone being asked to wear masks. It was good to be back! Our twice-monthly Taizé service, led by Yale Divinity School intern Oliver Mesmer, was held on Zoom on February 2 and resumed in-person on February 16. Oliver contributed greatly to our life together with creative and thoughtful Taizé worship, occasional sermons and his warm, open personality. We resumed mask-optional worship on March 6.

Lent began on Ash Wednesday, March 2 with Ashes on the Way, received by over 300 people. A contemplative Ash Wednesday service was held with the choir singing and the opportunity to receive the imposition of ashes or an anointing with oil. Oliver led a book study on Zoom on the five Lenten Wednesdays utilizing “Breathing Underwater: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps” by Richard Rohr. The five Sundays in Lent featured rich morning worship and 5:00 p.m. Vespers on the Green. Food items collected at the Vesper services were donated to the Cheshire Food Pantry. Additional events during Lent were on-going Taizé services, the quarterly communion service offered by Pastors James and Alison at Elim Park on March 7 and a concert given by the Colgate Chamber Singers on March 12.

A special celebration was held on the fifth Sunday in Lent, April 3 commemorating Alison’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her ordination and ministry at First Church. There was joyful worship and a festive reception afterwards, featuring video greetings, spoken words of tribute and thanks, wonderful food and gifts given.

Holy Week began on Palm Sunday, April 10 featuring a gathering on the Green for a festive procession with Star the Donkey continuing with a communal procession into the sanctuary for worship. The Wednesday book study and Taizé worship continued. Maundy Thursday featured Communion to Go from 7-9 a.m., with consecrated elements to receive in your car or take to someone at home. A 6 p.m. Last Supper in the Upper Room was held in the sanctuary featuring a light meal, prayer and communion. Good Friday was celebrated in a variety of ways. Dawn Marchand coordinated and led a noon-3 p.m. Walk with Jesus, a child-friendly intergenerational experience in the sanctuary. Cross Walk began at 6 p.m. with ministers and parishioners carrying the cross through Hillside Cemetery and back to the sanctuary with pauses for prayer, scripture and reflection. A service of Reverencing the Cross was held at 7 p.m.



Holy Saturday featured the installation of 1500 butterflies in the sanctuary. It was wondrous to behold! Easter Sunday was a day of high celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, the touchstone of our faith. There was a 6 a.m. sunrise service on the Green, and 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. festival worship services in the sanctuary featuring choir, organ and brass. He is risen indeed! An Easter egg hunt for the children was held outdoors after worship.

Laitly Sunday morning worship was held on April 24, combining the efforts of the Worship Ministry Group and the Environmental Justice Team. There were readings, fitting hymns, and three lay speakers. We said goodbye and thank you to Oliver in May, wishing him God's richest blessings in the years ahead. The Chancel Choir wrapped up their music ministry in June and 9 a.m. summer worship began. We enjoyed the air conditioned Parish Hall as the summer progressed. Music with Friends, led by Joe D'Eugenio, began on July 31. This monthly invitation to any parishioner to join with members of the choir and sing an easy-to-learn anthem in worship was very well-received. It continues on a monthly basis.

On Sunday, September 11 we returned to 10 a.m. worship in the sanctuary with the choir back to work! On Welcome Sunday we welcomed "home" a full church of members and returning friends. A picnic lunch was enjoyed on the Green after worship. On World Communion Sunday in October we returned to partial "regular" communion elements, while continuing to offer sealed elements. A meaningful Memorial Music Sunday in November filled the sanctuary with music by the Chancel Choir, augmented by members of the Greater Middletown Chorale.

The four weeks in Advent began on Sunday, November 27. The stars floating in the sanctuary grew in number as the weeks progressed. Thank you, Alison, and your many helpers! Pastors James and Alison offered an intimate Advent-themed communion service at 7:45 a.m. each Wednesday. Advent worship each Sunday was rich with great preaching and inspiring music. The annual Festival of Carols was held on Saturday, December 17. Our Chancel Choir, again joined by members of the Greater Middletown Chorale, filled the sanctuary with glorious music combined with scripture readings tracing the birth of Jesus. It was exciting to see the sanctuary filled with over 360 people, both members and townspeople. Quiet Christmas worship was held on December 19 for those experiencing loss and grief amidst the joy of the season.

The three Christmas Eve services were each unique and well-attended. The 5 p.m. service was family-friendly with Christmas bells. The 7 p.m. service offered communion and carols. The 11 p.m. service filled the sanctuary with candlelight, brass and choir. Christ is born! Christmas Sunday worship was relaxed with scripture and carols around the piano.

It was a busy and fulfilling year for the Worship Ministry Group. I would like to thank James, Alison and Joe for their tireless support, as well as Braxton Carrigan, our Church Council liaison. Thank you to outgoing members Susan Hostage and Emily Massimino. Our friend, Kerrie Dunne moved mid-year. Thanks to Susan Bishop, Anthony DePaolo, Bob Porter, and Katie Stover who are continuing their good work this coming year. It has been a privilege to work with you and further our shared mission at First Church. And a hearty "welcome" to new members Rich Grudzias, Susan Kellogg, Adam Perrin and Kim Tabor. Have a great 2023!

Respectfully submitted,  
Joey Ekberg, Chair

## **FAITH FORMATION MINISTRY**

The members of the 2022 Faith Formation Ministry Team are Michelle Kochiss (Chair), Megan Perez (Secretary), Catie Carrigan (Budget Representative), Courtney Devine, Karen Galvin, Kelly Gilchrist and the following staff members: Dawn Marchand, Todd Skrzyaniarz, and Alison McCaffrey. Our Church Council Liaison is Christine Fitzmaurice.

This ministry group is charged with the following responsibilities:

- Manage the church school and nursery programs
- Oversee the youth program
- Coordinate adult education programs
- Oversee the confirmation process
- Evangelism
- Evaluate options to provide faith formation education
- Select activities to be supported by the church
- Engage the congregation in faith formation activities
- Develop new opportunities for all youth and members of the church
- Align activities with the vision of the church

The Faith Formation Ministry Team began the year virtually and returned to in-person meetings in June. We focused on transitioning to “normal” by organizing events for all members of our congregation. Unfortunately, low participation did lead to the cancellation/postponement of events such as Bingo and Trivia Night. In response to the shift in participation, some of the group’s “fan favorite” events were reimaged. Our outdoor Harvest Costume Party morphed into a costume parade during fellowship. Our Advent wreath making event was replaced with children’s activities during the Church’s collective “Decorating the Sanctuary” event.

Activities specific to Church School are detailed in Dawn Marchand’s report. A brief overview of the programs and activities discussed/planned by the FF Ministry Team are listed below:

### Fellowship/Multigenerational Events

- The Lenten Pen Pal Project involved elementary aged children and a group of mature church members. Overall, 19 pairs participated this year.
- FF organized and ran the Lollipop Jungle, inflatables and other children games at the Strawberry Festival.
- Sponsored Coffee Hour in July and October
- Games on the Green
- Annual backpack drive yielded 150 backpacks for students in Waterbury
- Back to School Ice Cream Social
- FF organized children’s games and relays for Welcome Sunday
- Teams of four (1 adult, 3 youths) provided dinner at the Ronald McDonald house once a month
- Harvest Fellowship Costume Parade
- Advent Event/Decorate the Sanctuary

### Stepping Stones

- 6 participants attended the Foodology trip in the Spring
- Fall kick off saw numbers rise
- 12 students participated in Church scavenger hunt
- 22 participants visited 6 different homes to sing carols and spread Christmas Cheer

### Youth Ministry

- Bowling Night
- Todd restructured youth group to include a focus on various life skills and rolled out “First Church Top Chef”.
- HS and Middle School Youth supported Christian Community Action by helping to assemble Thanksgiving meals

*Please see details about these and other activities/events in Todd's Skrzyniarz's report.*

### Adult Education

- Book study led by Oliver, student minister
- Confirmation parents group led by Pastor Alison
- Pastor Alison continued her “Empty-nesters” group
- Working in conjunction with Caring Ministry, Pastor Alison provided communion on the road

*Please see details in Pastor Alison's report on these and other activities/events.*

### Closing Remarks

Despite the lingering challenges Covid-19 has brought to our community, the Faith Formation Ministry Team has successfully planned and reorganized events to help re-engage our congregation safely. In efforts to improve engagement, we will continue to collaborate, creatively maintain traditions and conceive of novel ways to further connect with each other and to our faith.

Respectfully submitted,  
Michelle Kochiss

## **OUTREACH MINISTRY**

2022 was a rebuilding year as Covid-19 still impacted us; we did not have a quorum for April and October. We were not able to find volunteers to continue the church garden and we did not collect food each month for the Cheshire food pantry.

However, we spent our \$10,000 allotment and offered many opportunities for parishioners to serve and donate. We organize our giving in three categories; local, state, and national and international. Locally we gave to Lights of Hope, Cheshire Human services, the Cheshire food pantry, the Interfaith Thanksgiving food drive and the local gun buyback program. Locally our contributions totaled \$3,663.12.

Branching out we gave to the UCC for the flooding disaster in Kentucky, Christian Community Action in New Haven for their turkey drive and a Maundy Thursday pizza party, Chrysalis, backpacks for children in Waterbury and Columbus House in New Haven. Total for this group was \$4,186.88. \$2,150 went to the UCC disaster relief for Ukraine, helping animals in Ukraine and for disaster flood relief in Puerto Rico.

First Church members continued this year being extremely generous; giving turkeys for CCA, gift cards for DCF children for Easter, backpacks for Waterbury children, Christmas presents for New Haven families through CCA, food donations for the Interfaith Thanksgiving food drive.

Members also supported our efforts by attending the Swords to Plowshares demonstration, the concert for Ukrainian animals and the service where Rev. Bonita Grubbs from CCA spoke. Our youth group helped with the Maundy Thursday party and getting the Thanksgiving food sorted for CCA. We prayerfully considered funding requests and we kept in mind our mission to be impactful.

Respectfully submitted,  
Diane Visconti, Secretary for OMG

## **CARING MINISTRY**

### Welcome Sunday

Welcome Sunday was held on Sunday, September 18, 2022. Invitations were mailed out to our members and communicated through our website and weekly e-blast. The worship service was held inside followed by a congregational photo taken outside on the church steps. Lunch and Fellowship occurred outside on the church green.

Sandwiches were pre-ordered via link by each attendee and then provided by Mabel's Kitchen & Michael's Deli in individually packaged containers. Chips and water were provided by the Caring Ministry Team. Cupcakes were ordered through Cheshire Baking Company and a local Ice Cream Truck arrived offering choices for our attendees. We ordered 200 sandwiches and had 200 plus at our event. The cost for the event was more than expected and is due to the rise in prices of things now, plus we had more people to attend. A very good problem to have.

Fellowship activities were provided by the Faith Formation Ministry Team and Outreach Ministry Team and fun was had for those who participated. The Membership Ministry Team was present with signups for the new directory they are updating. They also provided information about joining our church. The Environmental Justice Team implemented a green way of taking care of our garbage during the event. Other tables were set up to provide information regarding our church's 300th anniversary celebration. T-shirts, bottles and hats were available to purchase and forms for ways to participate in our church using our strengths and talents could be filled out.

Thanks to all our action team volunteers, a fun day of fellowship was held by all who attended.

### Communion on the Road

This ministry was restarted on June 5th with 9 persons delivering and 13 homebound members of the congregation receiving. The ministry has grown to 13 persons delivering with 18 potential recipients. Each month an email is sent mid-month by Rev. Alison to the deliverers, to determine their availability for the next month's Communion Sunday. If a deliverer does not utilize email a phone call is made to them either by Mary Strauss or Diane Albro.

Some deliverers bring Communion to the same member(s) each month, others visit with different individuals.

Once assignments are made, the deliverers contact their receivers to determine the best time for delivery on that Sunday or a subsequent day of the week.

The Communion kits are made up by Rev. Alison and sit on the Communion table during worship service. Each kit has the deliverer's name on it and a script for the in-home service. Prefilled elements are in the kits and include gluten free hosts. Extras are included in case family members or assistants are present and wish to receive Communion.

This is a special ministry that brings the congregation's love arms around the receiver and lets them know that they are not forgotten.

### Visiting Ministry

The Visiting Ministry was resumed in October. In September a small evening social and meeting was set up for those interested in participating, six persons attended. Mary Strauss, LCSW, gave a presentation on visiting, the necessity of confidentiality and how to interact with someone with dementia. Diane Albro spoke about her experiences with visiting. A discussion among those present then followed. Currently we have 3 persons actively visiting at times other than Communion Sunday. Many interested in visiting already bring communion to members. Rev. Alison makes the visiting matches. Visitors and Communion deliverers are asked to bring any changing needs of receiver(s) to the attention of the clergy.

### A Special Celebration

On the fifth Sunday in Lent, April 3 commemorating Alison's 20th anniversary of her ordination and ministry at First Church. An action team was composed of many members of the church. Invites were mailed out, requests for members past and present to send in messages and memories of her throughout her 20 years. A special, joyful worship service was planned by Rev. James and the Worship Ministry team.

Alison was presented with a picture, plant and a bouquet of flowers. A festive reception was to follow with her family and members surrounding her. A slideshow was created with video greetings, letters, memories and pictures as well as a few members reading them out loud during the celebration. . A beautiful cake, cookies, punch and coffee were served. A gift was presented to her on behalf of the congregation. Again, congratulations and thank you for your wonderful years of service at First Church.

### Flower Ministry

Sanctuary flowers have been provided by church members approximately 3 out of the 4 weeks each month. The remaining weeks flowers have been funded by the church council, at a cost of \$50 per bouquet. Response to the sign-up poster in the parlor has been good, but could improve.

Goal for next year - make sign up more visible and increase congregational response.

Since resuming flower delivery to homebound members in the spring, 4 people have formed an action team for delivery with an overwhelmingly positive response from our shut-ins. Weekly emails from Parish Care provide 2 names of recipients each week.

### Easter Plant and Christmas Poinsettias

The Easter Lilies were ordered from Kurtz Farms and an order form was coordinated for the church bulletin for members to purchase them in honor or memory of family or friends. They have a choice to pick theirs up or donate to be delivered to members which Parish Care provides a list of members to receive them and their information.

An action team was created to make arrangements to pick up 80 plants and arrange them in the sanctuary and to deliver them to the members. 50 members received plants. The Christmas Poinsettias were also ordered from Kurtz Farms and an action team was created to be present to receive the plants at the church and arrange them in the sanctuary.

An order form was also created to place in the bulletin for members to purchase them in honor or memory of family or friends. Again, Parish Care prepares a list of members who would benefit from receiving a plant and an action is created and around 50 members are delivered a plant.

For Christmas the hanging of the greens are done by an action team after Thanksgiving and at the first of advent. The greens are hung and white bows are placed on them. Candles are also placed in the sanctuary and Parish Hall windows. The white bows are changed to red prior to Christmas.

#### Fellowship/Coffee Hour

Fellowship/Coffee hour has been attended by 30-40 members each week.

Church committees and groups have sponsored the majority with individual members and families hosting less than 25%. A sign-up poster is available to all in the parlor, as well as a weekly notice in the church bulletin.

Guidelines for hosting have recently been updated and posted in the kitchen.

Goals for the coming year include increased member attendance each week, increased commitment to sponsor by Ministry teams and action teams along with more individuals and families from the congregation stepping up to host. We also hope to have Caring ministry members available for guidance to host each week.

#### Special Reception

A special reception was held in Parish Hall for 2022's Confirmation class. For the first time, the previous year's confirmation class and some members of the Caring ministry team hosted it for them. A beautiful cake was provided with a picture of the group of confirmands on it. It was a success and we will continue to request the previous year's confirmation class to host.

Respectfully submitted

Darby Bronson, Diane Albro, Jane Brown

#### Parish Care

The Parish Care committee consists of three Parish Care coordinators, Martha Lape, Karen Gravino, and Grace Knipe, Pastor Alison, Pastor James, and other faithful volunteers. The committee's purpose is to reach those parishioners who are ill, experiencing grief and/or in need of contact and encouragement.

For all of 2022 we were able to meet in person most weeks, sharing concerns and arranging contact through cards and phone calls. In-home contact has been limited to Communion on the Road, and some Friendly Visitors.

The coordinators provide the list of folks who are given lilies at Easter and poinsettias at Christmas to remind them the church is thinking of them and also the names for the Church School children to send Christmas cards (a volunteer also sent Easter cards) and a list of people to visit for Christmas Caroling.

We give thanks to those of you who show your care for others by making a phone call to someone you haven't seen for a while, just to talk and brighten their day.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Lape, Karen Gravino and Grace Knipe

## **FACILITIES MINISTRY**

Six elected members served on the Facilities and Grounds Ministry Group: Bruce Bathrick, Sue Branzell, Ted Holtzman, Regan Huntley, Mark Sullivan, and Dean Warburton. Kevin Ross (as Sexton), James Redeker (as Council Rep.) and Pastor James Campbell serve as non-voting members. The Group is charged with the care and management of the physical plant. The Church Sexton is the daily plant manager, operating in consultation with the group as required by circumstance.

A two-year refurbishment project was completed for the interior of the historic Whiting House. In addition to an Action Team effort to revitalize the first floor spaces, a commercial contract to refurbish the second floor apartment was completed. Kevin Ross, as Sexton, replaced all windows with new thermal insulated windows. Dangerously deteriorated concrete steps on the south side of the Whiting House were replaced by an Action Team. Bill and Mary Torello have been maintaining the front Whiting House gardens, the Environmental Justice Team, the south gardens. The unimproved grounds of the north side of the building was regraded by a contractor, adding a small bluestone terrace and landscaping for use by the apartment occupants. Finance and Administration has rented the apartment at a competitive rate, adding significantly to our income stream.

All church grounds received critical attention, with removal of much unwanted growth and significant trimming of shrubs and trees by Action Teams. The dense overgrowth along the rear access road was removed by a contractor. These improvements will enable future Action Teams to maintain our landscape at an acceptable level. We will challenge the congregation to meet this need. Two replacement shade trees were planted on the Green by an Action Team. The Environmental Justice Team met with the Facilities and Grounds Group on two occasions, discussing common goals and cooperation. An investigation into the use of Solar Panels has begun. A recycling program has begun and has been proposed to be annualized in the budget.

It is the mission of the Facilities and Grounds Ministry Group to support all the other Ministry Groups in their Christian Missions. We are committed to maintaining the interior and exterior of our church properties to a safe and attractive standard and welcome all suggestions and assistance in this goal.

Respectively Submitted,  
Ted Holtzman

## **FINANCE MINISTRY**

The four main responsibilities of the Finance and Administration Ministry Group are Treasury, Personnel, Generosity (formerly Stewardship) and Technology. The smooth functioning of our church is dependent on many of the tasks for which our team is responsible - approving bill payments and disbursements, monitoring actuals vs. budget, serving as liaison with tenants and monitoring staff performance appraisals. Some of our key accomplishments in 2022 are detailed below.

Technology improvements continued to be key to providing parishioners multiple options for experiencing “church”. While services were held in-person for the entire year, the services are also streamed on YouTube and Facebook for those who choose not to attend for numerous reasons. Improvements to cameras, WiFi and the sound system have helped to make this seamless for all. After beginning renovations in 2021, the Whiting House apartment was completed in 2022 and new tenants moved in during the month of May. Many thanks to Kevin Ross for helping to spearhead this project, which provides a new revenue source for the church.

The annual budget process was adjusted to focus on determining all the necessary and desired costs for achieving the church’s mission both within and outside in the community. The Generosity (Stewardship) campaign then encouraged members and friends of First Church to meet that budget. As of January 13, 2023, we received 170 pledges totaling \$533,923 and an additional \$39,913 in matching and one-time gifts, bringing the campaign total to \$573,837. The average pledge amount is \$3,141, which represents an increase of \$405 per pledge received on average.

We were blessed by the generosity of 3 donor families who came forward and offered a matching opportunity to the congregation. They matched the increased amount of each pledge in excess of the current 7% inflation rate. 52% (88 of 170) of pledges received were increased more than 7% and triggered matching dollars from the generous donors. Even with fewer pledges, the congregation was moved to significantly increase their pledges. On average, pledges were 13% higher than in the prior year.

Thanks to the generosity of those who have pledged and increased their pledges, we surpassed our pledge target for this year. With our costs increasing, we need to continue to consider how best to budget our income and to engage the support of the congregation in our finances.

The Finance and Administration Ministry Group would like to thank all members of the church community who continued to support the church with their financial pledges. The Ministry Group would also like to thank the generous members that sponsored our matching campaign and the members of the Generosity team: Mark Hall, Jim Louys, Alison Perrin, Jim Redeker and Dean Warburton. Their commitment and hard work enabled us, as a congregation, to realize our vision of an aspirational budget for the year to come.

2023 breakdown by pledge unit vs. prior year:

Pledge Type (vs. 2022)	2023 Pledge Count	2023 Pledge Total*
Increase	104	\$ 390,174
New	15	\$ 24,530
Decrease	8	\$ 7,580
Unchanged	43	\$ 111,639
Total	170	\$ 533,923

\*Pledge amounts displayed do not reflect additional \$39,913 in matching gifts.

Pledges by Range:

Pledge Ranges	Pledge	Amount*	% of Pledge
< \$500	20	\$ 5,748	1%
\$500 - \$999	31	\$ 9,709	4%
\$1000 - \$2999	69	\$122,272	23%
\$3000 - \$4999	25	\$89,240	17%
\$5000 - \$9999	17	\$116,408	22%
> \$10000	8	\$180,546	34%

\*Pledge amounts displayed do not reflect additional \$39,913 in matching gifts.

As 2023 begins, the Finance and Administration Ministry Group looks to continue serving the church by being responsible stewards of the church’s finances, continuing to improve technology needs and supporting our staff.



As chair of the Finance and Administration Ministry Group, I offer many thanks to the members of the Ministry Group (Charlene Black, Mark Hall, Suzanne Lawson, Alison Perrin, Roy Pritchard, David Hostage (Church Council Liaison), Martha Triplett), as well as Karen Purslow (Church Treasurer), Mark Sprankel (Associate Treasurer) and Jay Knipe (Assistant Treasurer) for all of their dedication to our Ministry Group's tasks and responsibilities.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Betsy DePaolo  
Chair, Finance and Administration Ministry Group

## **MEMBERSHIP MINISTRY**

It was decided that a Membership Ministry Group be created for 2022.

This Ministry Group consisted of Bobbie Porter, Chairman, Betty Pritchard, Secretary, Sara Buell in charge of The Pictorial Directory, Henry McNulty, Kathy Warburton, Vincent Caruso and James Campbell. Meetings took place both in person and via Zoom.

There was much discussion about the roles of our group. The following goals were presented and accepted.

We should be attracting new members by promoting a wide and welcoming atmosphere among the congregation and within the community with the aim of attracting people who wish to join us. Visitors are encouraged to sign the Visitor card in the pew. Once information is presented, a letter goes out from our ministers and the name is then given to our ministry group for follow up.

We help prospective new members with their formal orientation sessions. This year New Member Sundays took place on June 12 and October 23. Our ten newest members are:

Roger "Rocky" Hanock, Nick and Kathrine Healy, Rita Kovacs, Barbara Langner,  
Marshall and Ellie Linden, Dianna Stapleton, Jerry and Barbara Swenson

Once our new members join, we help with integrating them into our church family. The Shepherd program has been revitalized and has been successful. Each of our newest members is engaged in church activities.

Finally, our goal is to keep all members, young and old, engaged in the mission and ministry of our church. This year we had the opportunity to reach out to the entire congregation with a written invitation to attend the Celebration of Alison McCaffrey's 20th Anniversary on April 3. Our second written invitation was to announce Welcome Sunday on September 18th. The pictorial directory is another undertaking which involves the entire membership.

This ministry group's first directive was to oversee the creation and coordination of a church pictorial directory. Due to the technological advances over the past seven years, our church has the ability now to produce the document in house. Many volunteer hours have been spent gathering pictures and verifying contact information. Distribution of the directory is scheduled for January 2023. Hopefully it will be available electronically and printed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bobbie Porter

## STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

2022 marked the return of the Strawberry Festival after a two year COVID related absence. A small but incredibly dedicated team reestablished connections with suppliers, crafters, and community groups. Together we invited our neighbors to join us on our green on a partly cloudy Saturday afternoon. We were able to raise \$15,000 for our Church. However, anyone who was at the event would agree, had we raised \$1 it would have been successful. Such a wonderful day!

Strawberry Festival 2022 would not have happened without our scores of volunteers and our remarkable team - Betty and Roy Pritchard, Craig Cappiello, Mark Hall, Jim Louys, James Leathem, Kirsten Sullivan, Jackie Cole, Jacki Hissick, Steve Mulholland, Darby Bronson, Anthony and Betsy DePaolo, and Kevin Ross.

**Starting Checkbook Balance** **\$5,304.49**

### PAYMENTS RECEIVED

Vendors/Crafters	
Received by check	\$1,405.00
Electronic Payments	\$3,960.00
Total Vendor Payments	\$5,365.00

Revenues at Festival	
Cash receipts	\$18,909.00
Charged using Square	\$2,939.15
	\$21,848.15
<u>Total Festival Income</u>	<u>\$27,213.15</u>

### EXPENSES PAID

Ukraine Donation	\$250.00
Mad Tents	\$3,480.00
Cheshire Community Band	\$350.00
Nurse on site	\$90.00
Strawberries	\$2,045.82
Chesprocott	\$25.00
Ice	\$240.00
ATM	\$250.00
Police coverage	\$688.00
Food Tent / Drinks / Biscuits	\$4,458.81
AJ Carting	\$300.00
<u>Total Festival Expenses</u>	<u>\$12,177.63</u>

Net Income from SF \$15,035.52

Adjustment (Square)	\$0.81
Ending Checkbook Balance	\$20,340.82
Amount to Church Budget	\$15,000.00

CB Balance (carry to 2023) \$5,340.82

Respectfully submitted,  
Mark Sullivan, Strawberry Festival Chair

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TEAM**

In 2022, the Environmental Justice Team continued its work to help advise the Ministry Groups and educate members of the congregation about ways to be more sustainable and to demonstrate ways to promote native planting and biodiversity.

Environmental Justice Minutes continued in each Friday Eblast. During the Lenten season we offered weekly sustainability challenges to the congregation.

In April, Laity Sunday fell close to Earth Day, and along with the Worship Ministry Group we led a Creation-themed worship.

At the end of April, as our contribution to the Cheshire Creation Care launch weekend, we hosted naturalist Judy Preston, speaking on “Gardening for Good: Saving the Earth One Garden at a Time,” and held a free give or take “Toys & Tools.” That event had a disappointing turnout but we felt that it was still a good concept and we should host something similar in the fall. As part of the event, the church school children joined with others from St. Peter’s and Temple Beth David to learn about turtles and make Turtle Crossing signs which were placed strategically around Cheshire to alert the public to these creatures’ vulnerability.

Karen and Anne did two yard assessments to help the homeowners make their yards more nature-friendly.

In May, the New Haven UCC Association met at our church. The EJT helped host the supper with reusable glass dinner plates, which we washed and dried by hand, drawing favorable comments from attendees. The program featured the SNE-UCC Minister of Environmental Justice, Emma Wallin-Brewer, who presented a talk and group exercise about Creation Ministry.

The Strawberry Festival organizers consulted the EJT about sale of single-use water bottles at the festival. Since it was profitable with no obvious practical alternative, we agreed with its value to sustain the church’s missions and ministries but would look for other options in the future.

An official dedication of the Whiting House pollinator garden was held in July during worship; people were invited to view the native plantings afterward. Gardens are never finished, and work will continue to curate the plantings and battle invasive flora.

A compost bin was placed near where people enter the parking lot. It has yet to reach its potential.

The EJT suggested to the Caring Ministry Group that we’d like to encourage people to bring their own reusable mugs to Coffee Hour to reduce the number of disposable cups. It was felt that this might make visitors feel less included, but that the Group would discuss it. The issue is still pending, with outstanding issues of cleanup and storage.

At the Welcome Sunday luncheon, plastic clam shell sandwich containers were offered. These were collected for recycling by members of the EJT. Alternatives to single use plastic will be explored for future events.

In October, Sunshine gave a talk on “Is it Recyclable?” This very informative, well planned lecture was attended by about 40 people, many from the community. This was followed by a booth on recycling at the Coalition for a Sustainable Cheshire’s Sustainability Fair, hosted along with our CCC partners. The following week, we sponsored “Toys & Trimmings” give or take, which had disappointing participation.

In November, Anne addressed the Annual Meeting of the New Haven Association, hoping to form a collaboration of member congregations interested in environmental justice ministry. Our church is currently the only congregation in the association with a Green designation.

Later in November, the EJT turned its attention to seeking congregational affirmation in the form of an Environmental Covenant. After approval of the wording, Anne and Henry attended a Council meeting, then visited all the ministry group meetings to assess reaction and create an FAQ document. The Creation Covenant and FAQs will be presented at the Annual Meeting and a meeting date to vote on its acceptance will be announced.

Co-chairs: Anne McNulty and Karen Schnitzer. Team members: Sunshine Fiore, Regan Huntley, Henry McNulty, Ellie Pata, Rachel Pata, Leah Sanders, Mark Sullivan, Diane Visconti, the Rev. James Campbell, and CE Director Dawn Marchand. Catherine Dignan provided help with the garden.

Anne McNulty  
Co-Chair, Environmental Justice Team

## **CHRISTMAS FAIR**

We were back!!! Last year at this time we said we hoped to bring the Fair back to its full size in 2022 and with the exception of the youth activities, we were able to do that with the help of everyone involved and there were over fifty of you who worked in some capacity over those three days.

Once again, we were able to provide our usual welcoming start to the holidays for the folks in Cheshire and those who came from further away. It was good to see so many smiles and happy faces and especially heartwarming to hear someone say “best Fair ever!” as they left.

We want to thank all of you who made the beautiful items, cooked, baked, made chocolates, and assembled baskets and jars to sell and those who came to help set up and clean up, and those who worked the day of the Fair. When we say it takes the whole church to do a Fair, it’s obvious from this list.

We have to take a peek into 2023 here and tell you that on Sunday, January 8, 2023 at the end of worship we presented our incoming church president, Karen Helene a check for \$7,500 our net profit from the Fair. \$7,000 will go to the church budget and \$500 to Youth Mission Trips, a commitment we have made to our youth for many years.

Over the summer, we encourage folks to think of something that would be a good item to make and donate to sell at the Fair.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Christmas Fair Team

## **HISTORIAN**

The History Committee continues to work on cleaning and organizing the archives. Our draft of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History has been brought up to the end of 2021, and we will shortly be adding the church's activities for 2022.

2022 can be considered the year of restoration of normal church activities. While coronaviruses continue to mutate, they have not interfered with holding services in the church as we began in the Summer of 2020. In-person attendance, however, has not returned to pre-Covid levels. We continue to offer live-streamed online coverage of the Sunday services.

Our Music program has returned to pre-Covid level. Memorial Music Sunday featured two choral anthems and a duet. Our Annual Festival of Carols completely filled the sanctuary, which has not occurred for several years.

On Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup> we remembered that 300 years ago a small group of our former members received permission to hold services in what eventually became Cheshire, and they then welcomed our first minister Rev. Samuel Hall.

Respectfully submitted,  
Richard A. Eppler

## **NOMINATING REPORT**

I want to thank the members of the Nominating Committee this year. They were:

- Worship-Anthony DePaolo
- Faith Formation-Chris Fitzmaurice
- Outreach-Jack Sellati
- Finance and Administration-Charlene Black
- Facilities and Grounds-Mark Sullivan
- Membership-Bobbie Porter
- Caring-Jane Brown
- President-Tracy Tyree
- Pastors James and Alison

Even after the submission of this report, the committee continues to work to fill the vacancies that remain. I appreciate their faithful efforts to find the right people to do God's work in our church and beyond.

Respectfully submitted,  
Karen Helene, Nominating Chair/President-Elect

**(2023 Nominations are on next page)**

## **2023 Nominations**

### **President**

Karen Helene 2024

### **Past President**

Tracy Tyree 2024

### **President Elect**

Jim Redeker 2024

### **Clerk**

Leah Sanders 2024

### **Treasurer**

Betsy DePaolo 2024

### **Associate Treasurer**

Mark Sprankel 2024

### **Assistant Treasurer**

Jay Knipe 2024

### **Moderator**

Bob Giddings 2024

### **Assistant Moderator**

Henry McNulty 2024

### **Financial Secretaries**

Suzanne Lawson 2024

Craig Cappiello 2024

Ken Euerle 2024

Marianne Eagleson 2024

Shirley Albanese 2024

### **Auditor**

-Vacant- 2024

### **Historian**

Dick Eppler 2024

**Church Council Councilors**

David Hostage  
Kirsten Sullivan  
Alan Skiparis  
Bill Mann  
Regan Huntley  
Bob Porter  
Jim Louys

**Worship Ministry Group**

Susan Bishop  
Anthony DePaolo  
Katie Stover  
Kimberly Tabor  
Rich Grudzias  
Susan Kellogg  
Adam Perrin  
-Vacant-

**Outreach Ministry Group**

Beth Ross  
Jack Sellati  
Ernie Swartz  
Lorraine Morrissey  
Toni Moldenhauer  
-Vacant-

**Caring Ministry Group**

Diane Albro  
Jane Brown  
Ken Euerle  
Joellyn Jason  
Mary Strauss  
Barbara Swenson  
Emily Massimino

**Facilities and Grounds Ministry Group**

Bruce Bathrick  
Sue Branzell  
Ted Holtzman  
Mark Sullivan  
Joe Pettit  
-Vacant-

**Finance and Administration Ministry Group**

Suzanne Lawson  
Alison Perrin  
Roy Pritchard  
Harry Black  
James Leathem  
Craig Cappiello  
Susan Hostage  
Justin Mazzoni

**Faith Formation**

Catie Carrigan  
Courtney Devine  
Kelly Gilchrist  
Holly Skrzyniarz  
Christine Fitzmaurice  
Sara Schmidt  
-Vacant-

**Membership Ministry Group**

Sara Buell  
Valentino Caruso  
Henry McNulty  
Betty Pritchard  
Sharon Puhalla  
Sunshine Fiore

**Nominating Committee Chairs**

Andy Irish  
Carey Irish

**Delegates**

Susan Hostage  
David Hostage  
Anne McNulty  
Henry McNulty  
Martha Lape  
Karen Gravino  
Kevin Ross  
Beth Ross  
Vacant (3)



## **DELEGATES**

Our church's Delegates to the United Church of Christ represent the congregation in activities of the New Haven Association and the Southern New England Conference of the UCC.

### The New Haven Association

The Association's spring meeting was held at our church. The Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin, Minister for Environmental and Economic Justice at the Southern New England Conference, spoke on Green churches.

The fall annual meeting was held at Woodmont UCC in Milford. We received a new church into the Association, the Manantial de Gracia ("Spring of Grace") UCC in Hamden, the only Latino church remaining in the conference. They celebrated their 40th anniversary last year. Alison McCaffrey was given flowers and a gift in thanks for her six years of service as Moderator of the Association, as well as her many other years on various association committees. Anne McNulty was named the point person for the Association's Green Churches Initiative.

Delegates attended three Ecclesiastical Councils: on June 22 for David Yoshida, on September 14 for Jordan Rebholz, and on October 19 for Martine Bruno. David's was in person and on Zoom, and the last two were held virtually. Delegates also attended three ordinations: for Jack Mahoney on January 23 and Caryne Eskridge on April 9, both in person at Spring Glen UCC in Hamden and live-streamed; and for Jordan Rebholz at Asylum Hill Church, Hartford, in person on October 23.

### The Southern New England Conference

The third SNE-UCC annual meeting was held, virtually, on June 18. About 400 people attended for a day of worship, building connections, and looking forward with a focus on justice.

Our church's Delegates in 2022:

Bill Farrell  
Millie Farrell  
David Hostage  
Susan Hostage  
Karen Gravino  
Martha Lape  
Anne McNulty  
Henry McNulty  
Kathy Warburton  
Beth Ross  
Kevin Ross

Respectfully submitted,  
Henry McNulty, Delegate

## **CHURCH CLERK**

A summary of the minutes of the Annual Church Meeting held during 2022 is listed below. The complete minutes may be found in the church permanent record book and are available to interested parties.

**Annual Meeting, January 23, 2022**, for the following purposes:

1. Accepting the Annual Report for 2021
2. Accepting the budget for 2022
3. Election of Church Council, Ministry Group Members, and other church officers
4. State of the church
5. Other Business

### **Resolutions:**

#### **Item:**

1. The Annual Report was accepted.
2. The 2021 budget was accepted.
3. A motion was passed with one opposing vote to approve the election of Church Council, Ministry Group members and other Church officers.
4. Informational presentation, no action required.
5. Other business: Anne McNulty presented a proposed covenant by the Environmental Justice Group. We have completed requirements of this covenant. She also read a modified children's covenant, to promise to live in environmentally responsible ways in the future.

## **CHURCH STATISTICS**

Total membership as of December 31, 2021	<b>764</b>
Admissions:	
Confirmation	13
Confessions of Faith/Reaffirmation of Faith	4
Letter of Transfer	5
Associate Transfer	1
<u>Total Admissions:</u>	<u>23</u>
Dismissions:	
Deaths	6
Transfer by Request	4
<u>Total Dismissions:</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Total Membership as of December 31, 2022</u>	<u>777</u>

**ADMISSIONS:**

Confessions of Faith/Reaffirmation of Faith:

Roger Hanock  
Dianna Stapleton

Rita Kovacs  
Barbara Swenson

Letter of Transfer

Katherine Healey  
Barbara Langner

Nicholas Healey  
Eloise Linden

Marshall Linden

Associate Transfer

Gerald Swenson

Confirmation:

William Allen  
Haylie Cieslewski  
Leo Ehrenfels  
Caitlin Fanning  
Kaitlyn Matzkin  
Kira Strauss

Ethan Brady  
Amelia Devine  
Monica Ehrenfels  
Daniel Irish  
Daniel Stewart  
Nichole Stuart

Paige Warburton

**DISMISSIONS:**

Transfer by Request:

Barbara Logsdon  
Jordan Rebholz

Gary Logsdon  
Bobby Rebholz

Deaths & Funerals:

Barbara Barlok  
Faye Gagne  
Adelaide Marx

Joy Deegan  
Kenneth Gertz  
Fred Turner

**BAPTISMS:**

Salvatore Aleister Amato  
Henry Gene Barna  
Dylan James Close

Cassia Emilia Amorim  
Logan Jacob Bozza  
Marjorie Saleena Prinz

Jacob Bozza (adult)

**WEDDINGS:**

Vanessa Velez to Joseph Richello (performed by David Bergen of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Newington; First Church Representative Rev. Alison McCaffrey)

## 2023 PLEDGERS

The following is a list of individuals and families who have made financial pledges to the church as of December 31, 2022 for the 2023 Fiscal Year. The list is alphabetical and does not represent the amount pledged. We apologize for any accidental errors or omissions and we again express our thanks to those who have pledged financial support to the church for the coming year.

John Afman and Sue Chatfield

Shirley Albanese

Edward and Christine Albrecht

Richard and Diane Albro

David and Karin Arai

Phyllis Balsler

Beth and Robert Barnes

John Bates

Bruce Bathrick

William and Joan Benedetto

Susan Bishop

Harry and Charlene Black

Jane and Edward Bower

Lilja Bradford

Sue and Cliff Branzell

Dwight and Darby Bronson

Jane Brown

Jeffery and Sara Buell

James Campbell

Lisa Canas

Craig Cappiello

Braxton and Catie Carrigan

Valentino Caruso and Sara Schmidt

Brian Castler and Kathy Duffendack

Matthew and Katie Childs

Ford and Jackie Cole

John and Margaret Conant

Michelle and Christopher Corso

Chris and Jan Cowles

Alphonse and Paula Criscuolo

John and Holly Crowell

Michael and Maureen Crowley

Christian and Stacey DeAngelis

Nancy DeFrancesco

Andrew and Susan DelGrego

Anthony and Betsy DePaolo

Brendan and Courtney Devine

Linda and Todd Dixon

Harrison and Marcia Lou Dodd

Virginia Donovan

William and Marianne Eagleson

Jean Edson

Karl and Sophally Ehrenfels

Joey Ekberg

Richard and Ruth Eppler

Marla Erk

Dan and Elizabeth Esty

Kenneth Euerle

Robert and Suzanne Fackler

William and Millie Farrell

David and Sunshine Fiore

Chris and John Fitzmaurice

Patrick Fitzmaurice

Stephen Fitzmaurice

Lorna Fowler

Russell and Erica Fritz

Tim and Karen Galvin

Carol Gardell

Carolyn Garthwait

Joseph and Janet Garthwait

William Gere

Wayne and Jill Gibbs

Robert Giddings

Kelly and Amy Gilchrist

Janet Gordon

Marilyn Gordon

Tim and Sharon Graver

Fred and Karen Gravino

Cheryl Grime  
Richard and Barbara Grudzias  
Vernon and Cheryl Guetens  
Ramin and Linda Hakim  
Mark and Kate Hall  
Terry Hamley  
Tim and Laurie Hart  
Nick and Katharine Healy  
Karen and Bill Helene  
Janet Holmes  
Edward and Joyce Holtzman  
David and Susan Hostage  
Walter and Mary Hug  
Regan and Paul Huntley  
Mary Hyson  
Andy and Carey Irish  
Joellyn and William Jason  
Evan and Judy Kasack  
Susan Kellogg  
Wendi Kemp  
Hal Kevorkian  
Claudia Kile  
Patricia King  
Jay and Grace Knipe  
Jeff and Michelle Kochiss  
Rita Kovacs  
Jason and Sara Kroon  
Barbara Langner  
Martha Lape  
Jim and Suzanne Lawson  
James and Janet Leathem  
Marshall and Ellie Linden  
Jim Louys  
Ruth MacDonald  
Bill and Lori Mann  
Marcos Martins  
Sarah Marx  
Emily Massimino

Richard and Susan Mattson  
Bill Maturo  
Justin and Amy Mazzoni  
Alison and Matt McCaffrey  
Edward McElligott  
Richard McLain  
Henry and Anne McNulty  
Toni Moldenhauer  
Jane Montgomery  
Judson and Janet Moore  
Carol Morris  
Lorraine Morrissey  
Laurie and Christopher Mozian  
Stephen and Joyce Mulholland  
Lauren Overlock  
Attila and Augusta Ozdemirer  
Megan Perez  
Adam and Alison Perrin  
Susan Persio  
Joseph and Karen Pettit  
Richard and Kathleen Pfeiffer  
Christine Pittsley  
Bob and Bobbie Porter  
Michael Pownall  
Stephen and Miriam Prentice  
Roy and Elizabeth Pritchard  
Paul and Sharon Puhalla  
Jeff and Karen Purslow  
James and Nancy Redeker  
Jane Richards  
Stephen and Lori Robey  
Kevin and Beth Ross  
Holly and Paul Ruszczyk  
Walter and Lynn Ryan  
Leah Sanders  
Vlad Santiago  
Karen and Mark Schnitzer  
James and Deborah Schroeder

Frank Patrice Scinto  
Lisa Scully  
Jack and Robin Sellati  
Mick Shepard  
Alla Sivakoff  
Lisa and Stephen Skelly  
Alan and Susan Skiparis  
Todd Skrzyniarz and Danielle Adams  
Joshua and Tina Slocum  
Mark and Marianne Sprankel  
Kevin and Cynthia Stewart  
Nancy and Catherine Stover  
Paul and Mary Strauss  
Jill and William Stronk  
Charles and Irmlind Stronkowski

Mark and Kirsten Sullivan  
Ernie and Marty Swartz  
Jerry and Barbara Swenson  
William and Mary Torello  
Martha Triplett Strollo  
Michael and Rhonda Tripodina  
Loraine and Larry Trudell  
Marshall and Carol Tucker  
Tracy Tyree  
Diane and John Visconti  
Dean and Kathy Warburton  
Gerald and Helen Wilson  
Deborah Wylie  
Richard and Sally Ziegler

