

ANNUAL REPORT

First Unitarian
Universalist
Church of
Houston

2021 – 2022



BOARD REPORT

After a long and challenging year of exclusively online offerings, FUUCH safely reopened in July and remained open through surges and fluctuating alert levels thanks to the expert advice of our Health Advisory Team, FUUCH has been offering safe, in-person worship, livestreamed services, and virtual/hybrid gatherings. Through the cooperation of members and visitors, we were able to avoid spreading infections on the few occasions when people attended events while unknowingly carrying the virus.

Moving Towards a Greener & More Functional Campus

Several building repairs and updates were necessary before we could reopen; chief among them was the replacement of HVAC units, and the repair/remodeling of the women's first floor bathroom. The FUUCH community's well-known generosity was demonstrated through an overwhelmingly successful Reopening Readiness Campaign that made those repairs possible. As part of planning for these updates, the Board created a PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) and Greening Task Force charged with investigating how we might be able to increase our energy efficiency as these necessary improvements are made. These efforts enabled us to qualify for finan-

cial assistance through the PACE Program. Initially expected to be a two- or three-month assignment, ultimately required an entire year of work and resulted in a plan that will greatly reduce FUUCH's energy and water consumption.

Initially, we had hoped to use existing dedicated funds to address staff and volunteer needs by including a remodel of the library in the reopening updates. FUUCH enlisted designer and church member Laura M. to create a plan for the changes. Unfortunately, the building's structural limits rendered the initial idea infeasible. Nonetheless, the need for renovation remains. In addition to updated and more efficient working and meeting spaces for staff, there is a dire need for reorganization and improvement of the RE/nursery/rental space on the first floor. Currently, that space is used by the privately-owned daycare which helps provide rental income. Space limitations preclude its function as a shared space. As a result, our RE program is limited to using the Fireside room and is thus unable to provide the type of inviting, engaging space that is most conducive to the enriching RE programming we offer, and attractive to new families. Consequently, FUUCH has engaged Laura to create a larger master plan

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SENIOR MINISTER

The Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen

It is typical in letters like these to celebrate the accomplishments of the past year. However, this year, I feel more compelled to share with you my excitement about the future. The next year or so could prove to be pivotal in the life of the congregation. I am looking forward to it and want to share with you why I think it will be so important.

As you might remember, I am currently finishing the second year of a five-year developmental contract with First Houston. Developmental ministry is designed for congregations that have become stuck in some set of patterns that need to shift before they can anticipate having a successful, long-term settled ministry. For First Houston, it has meant working to answer five questions, or developmental goals, that the congregation identified for itself during my interim ministry.

In her letter, Board President Ruth Hoffman-Lach offers you reflections on the progress we have made to date — and there has been a lot of it — on each of these goals. I am

excited because I suspect that in the next year we will be making even more.

Together, we will be working to lay a firm foundation for future generations. The theme of this year's stewardship drive, the most successful in many years, was "Building the Legacy of Tomorrow." And we are focused on doing just that!

Our collective effort in the coming months will result in the creation of a new covenant, vision, and mission for the congregation. These are texts that will guide in our ministry together as we seek to grow our souls and heal the world. In a healthy congregation, they are documents that both describe our present life together and are rooted enough that they rarely require revision. Some congregations in New England, for instance, still use the same covenants that they wrote three or four hundred years ago.

As I shared with you on Covenant Sunday, the Covenant, Vision, and Mission Committee of the Board has defined these texts in these terms:

Vision:

An aspirational statement of what the congregation desires the Beloved Community of First UU to be.

Mission:

A statement of what the congregation is charged to do to move toward their vision of Beloved Community.

Covenant:

A statement of what we — the congregation — promise to one another to create the Beloved Community we envision. That is, how the congregation will behave (be) with one another as we take action on our mission to move toward our vision.

Taken together, they are statements that define what it means to be a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston. I am excited to craft them with you. I believe that, in these times, we are called to both serve our members and the wider community, working for collective liberation and spiritual deepening. With the ongoing crisis of resurgent white supremacy, the gathering climate catastrophe, and the global assault on democracy, as well as attacks on reproductive rights and the LGBTQ+ community, a strong Unitarian Universalist community is needed more than ever in this city. By clarifying who we are and the nature of our commitments, I know we can meet that need and make a difference in the lives of so many.

AGENDA FOR ANNUAL MEETING

- Welcome — Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen
- Call to Order — Ruth Hoffman-Lach, Board President
- Review of Rules and Procedures — Ruth Hoffman-Lach
- Approval of Minutes from 2021 Annual Meeting
- Presentation: Board Report — Ruth Hoffman-Lach
- Presentation: Annual Vision of Ministry — Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen
- Presentation: Candidate Slates — Linda Richardson, Nominating Committee Chair
- Election of Candidates
- Presentation and Vote: Resolution to Amend Articles of Incorporation — Ruth Hoffman-Lach
- Presentation: Proposed Budget for FY 2022-2023 — Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen and Ruth Hoffman-Lach
- Adjourn

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A Message from the ASSISTANT MINISTER

Rev. D. Scott Cooper

"When I'm tempted to make assumptions about a person, instead of asking 'what kind of person would do that,' I ask, 'what would lead a person to do that?' Instead of assuming the person is inherently different and perhaps even morally deficient, I suggest asking 'what would lead a person to do that,' which implies they may be part of our in-group and simply made a decision we don't understand but are trying to."

Rev. D. Scott Cooper

My ministry continues to shower me with opportunities to not only serve, but to learn as well. There was no way to predict the circumstances of the last two and a half years when I arrived here.

This past year will be remembered as the year we transitioned from exclusively virtual Sunday Services and meetings to a hybrid of in-person, livestreamed, and Zoom. As more and more people became vaccinated, we cautiously began offering in-person opportunities for you to gather together again.

Shortly after the Annual Meeting last year, we began our current practice of having two hybrid Sunday morning services, in-person and livestreamed. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this proved to be less time-intensive than pre-recording the services. As well as regularly preaching, I was pleased to be able to twice fill in as Song Leader. We were also able to begin having memorial services in the sanctuary, which had often been postponed because of the pandemic.

I was able to begin making in-person, pastoral care visits again, beginning a small group ministry program for newcomers and conducting the Navigating Grief workshop. Social Justice work was also able to move from the computer, as I attended the Women's March in October. I continued to meet with both the Third Ward Cloth and TMO throughout the year.

I organized the Service of Lamentation we held on the twentieth anniversary of 9/11. It proved successful, with many ministers

from the area and notable political figures appearing to recite names of the deceased.

As part of my continued work with the Ministers' Forum, I organized the "Trans Youth, Religion, and Health Panel Discussion" which was offered both virtually and in person. The next day, I attended the "Interfaith Trans Power Vigil" at Emerson UU Church, and earlier in the month, I attended the Trans Day of Visibility Rally at the Montrose Center.

I attended the opening of the Law Harrington Senior Living Center, a new residence primarily for LGBTQ+ folks. My husband and I also attended two fundraisers for the Montrose Center throughout the year, as well as one for Big Country AIDS Resources in Abilene and the Turtle Creek Chorale in Dallas. We also enjoyed the UU Music Fest, at the Unitarian Fellowship on Wirt Road, back after its hiatus.

I'm looking forward to being able to attend General Assembly in person as last year I attended virtually. I'm also glad I was able to attend the Festival of Homiletics. In April, after two years off, we were able to again hold our Southwest UU Minister's Association Retreat. I continue to serve as treasurer for SWUUMA. I also continue to see that our Houston Area Minister's cluster meets monthly.

After having been granted first renewal of my Preliminary Fellowship, my Ministerial Formation Team and I continued the reflective work needed to submit my next round of evaluations. I recently got word that I received my second renewal, and will continue working towards my goal of Final Fellowship as a UU Minister.

Now that more activities are back in person, our thriving will not only continue but expand, and I'm excited to continue on this journey with you.

MINUTES OF

FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON

Annual Meeting
June 19, 2021
1:00 pm

In Attendance:
82 members (per member sign-in)

Voting in Absentia:
19 members

Other Attendees:

Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen, Senior Minister; Rev. D. Scott Cooper, Assistant Minister; and Tawanna Grice, Church Administrator.

- 1. Call to Order.** The Constitution of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston states that a quorum for the Annual meeting shall consist of 15% of the membership. After a report of 82 members signed in, it was determined that a quorum was met and, accordingly, the meeting was called to order at 1:19 pm by Kelly Brown, Board President who served as meeting Chairman.
- 2. Appointing of Roles.** Steve Braun was appointed parliamentarian, and Karen Carlson was appointed timekeeper.
- 3. Review of Meeting Guidelines.** Kelly Brown reviewed the guidelines of order to be followed during question/comment periods. They were:
 - a. Members may be recognized to speak for two minutes.
 - b. No member may speak twice on any single issue/subject before all other members who wish to speak have done so.
 - c. Discussion of any issue/subject will be limited to 10 minutes. At the end of 10 minutes, the time may be extended by 10 additional minutes by majority vote.
- 4. Approval of Minutes.** The minutes of the June 14, 2020 Annual Meeting (which was held virtually)

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RE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

Worship

We offered three Multi-generational services. In November, 2021, Bread Communion focused on connecting to ancestors but bread was not shared due to a covid increase in our area. In December, the Christmas Service featured the traditional nativity story through the eyes of the camels. And in April, we celebrated Earth Day with a service planned and led by our Youth Group members (ages 14-19): Ben A, Wynnstan P., Mahilet K., Cady P. M. and Helina K., as well as the Youth Group leader, Kevin F.

Religious Education Groups

Children: In Fall 2021, we began meeting in person, offering Religious Education for children (ages 4-11) at 9:30 am & 11:30 am, exploring church-wide themes and in the Spring, connection to the earth. This year's leadership teams included: Jon N., Carmen D., Elsa K.-W., Rick R., Don P., Autumn E., Brandon Y., Asim S. and Annette C.

Youth

In the fall, two youth groups are formed (younger and older) and each meets alternating in-person and online. In-person programs were held nearby, at greenspace. From January through May, all youth met as one group. Sheryl A., Laura F., Johanna D., Scott S., Kevin F., Erica G. and Katherine M. were part of the youth leadership team.

Our weekly Tuesday Book Club continued. A few chapters from a chapter book are read aloud to the children, then they play games. This group's leadership team included: Elsa K.-W. (team leader), Autumn E. and Marcella W.

Four youth participated in our 8th grade Coming of Age program from February to May 2022: Alissa S., Ben A., Helina K. and Wynnstan P.. They will share their CREDOs (statements of belief) in a ceremony scheduled later in the year. Joe L., Lisa M., Sherry T.-H. and Jim M. participated as mentors. Our COA Team leaders were Bob M., James W. and Toni H.

On Sunday mornings, we continue to have nursery care for babies to pre-K and have 7 part-time staff, most of whom have served us for years: Delaina D. (nursery coordinator), Deborah G., Loreal T., Daisy D., Pandora J., Evelyn B. and Brenda D.

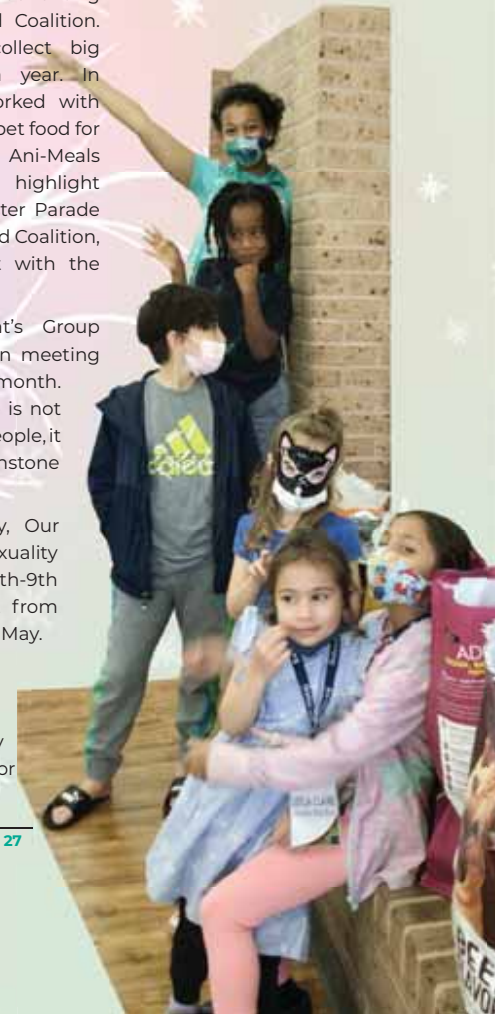
Special Events & Programs

RE, youth and the Community Projects Team (CPT) organized an annual "Food for the Community" drive benefiting the Emergency Aid Coalition. The plan is to collect big donations twice a year. In winter, we also worked with the CPT to package pet food for Interfaith Ministries Ani-Meals program. Another highlight was our annual Easter Parade to the Emergency Aid Coalition, a collaborate effort with the CPT.

In the fall, Parent's Group (babies-Pre-K) began meeting in person twice a month. Although the group is not attended by many people, it is an important touchstone for a core group.

After a short delay, Our Whole Lives Sexuality Program for 7th-9th graders (OWL) met from March through May. OWL participants' parents also met 3-4 times to address the role of primary religious educator for the parents.

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The past year has been a year of change for the music department at First Church. With the pandemic in full swing, Mark Vogel continued to meet with the choir bi-weekly and online, recording music for worship services until it became safe to return to singing live in the sanctuary.

Several guest musicians were invited to join Mark and record special selections for virtual services. Besides myself, featured musicians included Charlie B.,

Jael M., Steve C., Evan B., James W., Teresa G., and Teruhiko T.

In December 2021, after serving since 2015, Mark completed his term as Director of Music. Many choir members and congregants were sad to see him leave as he accepted a full-time teaching position. His many contributions, musicianship, and kind spirit are cherished. Mark's incredible organizational skills made it possible for me to easily transition into the role of Acting Director of Music in January 2022.

Teruhiko T. served as the pianist during the transition. In February, we welcomed Chelsea de Souza as Staff Pianist. Chelsea is a doctoral student at Rice University. Her incredible talent demonstrates

her mastery of a wide variety of genres and improvisatory capabilities. She has already moved us through her gifts on both the piano and the organ. What a joy it is to have the organ being played regularly for the first time in almost three years.

The music selections at First Church this year have been quite diverse. In addition to favorite Unitarian Universalist hymns, we've experienced an Islamic call to prayer, musical theater, classical, jazz, gospel, Motown, popular, folk, Ukrainian, Latin, and African American traditions.

Featured musicians since we have returned to in-person services have included Traveler, the String Band, Savannah Heximer, Steve Buza, Sophia Singleton, Jim McGehee, Karoline Mueller, Paige Powell, Carol Burrus, the

Pamoja Tutashinda Drumtribe, Mackenzie Manning, and Rev. D. Scott Cooper.

Each month a Spanish language hymn is featured during service. In February, music composed by African Americans were featured during each service. Then in March, we featured the compositions of female composers from diverse cultures. In March, Jim McGehee and Karolina Mueller graciously shared their musical gifts in the Ukraine Prayer Vigil. In May, the choir presented a Spanish language choral selection for Mother's Day.

In March, we presented the first of the new quarterly Arts Series, "Singing HERstory" written, produced, and performed by Jolie Rocke with Chelsea de Souza as pianist. It was livestreamed in between services and performed in the sanctuary for an audience of approximately forty people.

Future social justice arts forums are scheduled in June, September, and December.

On April 30, 2022, the music department invited the congregation, friends, and the community to the "I Am in Need of Music" concert. The concert included presentations by the choir, the music staff, and volunteer musicians from our congregation. Former Directors of Music, Musicians, Choir Members, Volunteers, and Supporters were honored in a candle-light remembrance ceremony. The concert honored the history of music at First Church while celebrating what we are doing today and what we are looking forward to in the future.

Every Thursday from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm, after a two-year hiatus, the choir members are strengthening their voices. The choir has been scheduled to sing at least once per month through June.

On May 7, 2022, a Mother's Day Service was held in Spanish. Guest saxophonist, Dr. Brian Perez, Director of Jazz Studies at Texas Southern University and new member, composer/singer, Edmund Pantuliano were featured musicians.

A small music team of volunteers is helping digitize the choral library and will plan future activities for the music program. The choir will participate in a choir retreat on Saturday, June 4th.

As a new member of the staff, I am honored to serve this congregation and continue the wonderful legacy of music at First Church.





A Note from the **BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR**



It's that time of the year again where we provide the recap of 2021 for life at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston. I am sure many of your past years cannot compare to the last two years you have experienced during this pandemic. Periods of not hugging the people you love, glaring angrily at the person who coughs in line near you without covering their mouth, wondering how many more wears you can get out of your favorite fitting mask, or spraying down everything with Lysol and taking extreme precautions, only to be one of the first people to get Covid in my family. Well, I guess that was only my story. (smile) Nevertheless, it has been a challenging year for us all to say the least.

Covid-19

Due to the pandemic, First Church was closed from

March 2020 to July 2021. The number of Covid-19 cases in the Harris County area had begun to decline. In April 2021, Rev. Dr. Collin Bossen and I contacted several health professionals in the church and invited them to become a member of the new Health Advisory Group. This is a group of doctors from various backgrounds (Epidemiologists,

Dentists, Family Medicine, etc.) who remained abreast of all the Covid updates in the surrounding areas and routinely shared them with us. Staff would pose questions to the team regularly, since Covid was so unpredictable. We would use the recommendations of the team, as well as what we felt was best

for our members, and created the "Covid Protocols for First Church". We also used the recommendations to determine when it would be best to reopen the church. A special thanks to Drs. Kim Waller, Joan Bitar, Carl Walther, Johanna DeYoung, Deborah Bozek, and for a short period of time, Michael Crouch. I know each of them have extremely busy schedules, but they never hesitated to assist and definitely considered the well-being of our members a priority. I am extremely grateful!!!

Facilities

The post-pandemic reopening of our campus required

immediate, extensive repairs. It also offered us the opportunity to "green" our facility (LED lighting, new high efficiency HVAC units, etc.). We are also in discussion with the Texas Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to see how a portion of our project might be financed by net-zero PACE financing. To prepare for our July 2021 grand reopening, extensive repairs were necessary. The Board of Trustees, Staff, & Congregation worked together to launch the Reopening Readiness Campaign (RRC). The campaign had a goal of \$275,000 and to date, we have raised \$275,525

from a total of 58 households.

I spent several weekends working with the Sextons decluttering areas of the church, negotiating contracts, hiring contractors, selecting décor and paint samples to remove all the rainbow-colored walls throughout the church to establish a more uniformed color scheme (even though we love rainbows). Our contracted Sextons (Yanet & Roberto) did an amazing job at reconditioning the courtyard.

Ron Cookston (Board - Vice President) and the Facilities Team (Michael Morrison, Bob Miller, Joe Lach & Jon Naylor) met to identify all other areas needing improvement. Ron created a huge checklist to target those areas of concern. We identified the smaller jobs we could complete at

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2022-2023
**BOARD
 NOMINEES**



**Sheryl
 Abrahams**

I first came to Houston in 1998 to attend Rice University, where I received a BA in Biology, Anthropology and Policy Studies, and also met my spouse, Steve. After graduation, I served as a US Peace Corps Volunteer in Turkmenistan, and became interested in public health and community development. I later received a MPH degree from the UNC Gillings School of Public Health and worked in maternal and child health research. My family and I have attended First UU Church since relocating back to the area in 2019. I help to lead the congregation's work with asylum-seekers from the southern border, and am one of the facilitators for the YoUUTH Unit (middle school) RE group. We have two boys in the RE program- Ben and Daniel. I was previously a member of First Jefferson UU Church of Fort Worth and the Brussels UU Fellowship in Brussels, Belgium. I can often be found leading school tours as a volunteer docent at the Houston Museum of Natural Science (please ask me about dinosaurs). My family loves to hike, read, travel and spend time with our two Miniature Schnauzers.



**Beth
 McCracken**

I am a long-time member of First Unitarian Universalist Church. I moved to Houston in 1980 and started attending services in 1981. I had a 35 year engineering career in the Oil & Gas Industry before retiring, had international assignments in London, Indonesia and Canada, and have traveled extensively for both business and personal reasons. I enjoy hiking, the outdoors, traveling, movies and art (I am member of both the Museum of Fine Arts and Menil Museum). I am an inveterate list maker and daily planner, and I look forward to working collaboratively on the board.



**Forrest
 Johnson**

My name is Forrest Johnson. My wife Kess and I have been members of FUU for 12 years. I have two sons--Keller and Kent. I used to teach high school RE and served on the committee that built the playground. I work for UTHealth in the Med Center. I am a huge music nerd and play guitar.



**Rachel
 Naegeli***

I was born into First Unitarian Universalist Church Houston and spent my childhood in the Religious Education classes. I am currently a Woman's Health Nurse Practitioner at Planned Parenthood of Gulf Coast where I have worked for 20 years. My spouse, Ellen Naegeli, and I have been members of First UU for about a decade and are raising our 2 girls, Lily and Rose in Manvel, Texas. Recently, I was a mentor in a Coming of Age program and a facilitator in the Our Whole Lives sexual education program.

* Appointed to the Board in 2021.

**NOMINATING
 COMMITTEE** Nominees



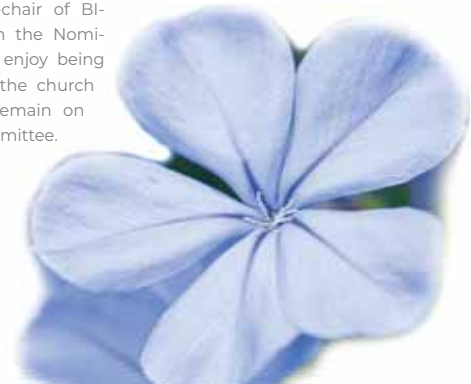
Georgette Dredge

I am Georgette Dredge, a longtime member of First UU. We moved to Houston in 1982 and joined First Church in 1983. We have remained at this church because it provides the spiritual, emotional, and social contacts we need. We especially like our involvement in the social justice work of the church. I have served on numerous committees during my many years at First UU. Some of my more recent involvement includes: Membership Committee, The Welcome Team, Mentoring at Lawson Academy, Worship Associate, Transformation Committee, Co-chair of BI-POC, and serving on the Nominating Committee. I enjoy being active in the life of the church and would like to remain on the Nominating Committee.



Natalie Browne

I have been a member of our church since 2003. Between 2009 and 2013 I was the Director of Religious Education. Currently, I am — among other things — a member of the Religious Education Leadership Team, the Personnel Committee, and I co-facilitate the Parents Group. I was raised in Brazil by missionary parents and still consider Brazil as one of my homes. I am retired, and enjoy friends, writing, walking and cooking.



JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL **jcc**

Weaving the fabric of community with our love and action. As the congregation, nation and world gradually emerged from the COVID pandemic, social justice issues continued to evolve and take on new urgency for those most in need. The 87th Texas Legislature convened one regular and three special sessions to consider issues significant to the First UU community including education funding, justice, reproductive freedoms, the rights of LGBTQ+ people and children, and the redrawing of voting maps and districts based on the 2020 decennial census. In August 2021, when the US withdrew military forces from Afghanistan, this created a need for even more loving support for asylum seekers and refugees. With partners in the Houston UU Network and community organizations, the JCC creatively rose to many social justice threats.

Adding our voices strengthens economic justice!

The pandemic clearly evidenced the need to increase school and workforce development funding. Children without computer and internet resources suffered the worst in an online learning environment. After a multi-year campaign to show Texas lawmakers how the Texas 313 Tax Code provides billions in corporate tax abatements, depriving schools of critical funding, legislators agreed not to renew the program in 2023 and grant \$4.6M to Capital Idea, a TMO workforce development program. Several members of the TMO team testified to the session and committee members.

TMO leaders (volunteers and staff) were also successful in leveraging millions of dollars of federal COVID funds sent to counties to support rental assistance. Reverends Bossen and Cooper were both leaders in this action.

Democracy is not a spectator sport

Every 10 years a population census redraws voting districts for equal US Rep apportionment. Population growth in Texas saw two new districts created. As political gerrymandering once again threatens to weaken minority voices, seven members protested at the Texas Impact rally in Austin, 15 joined a virtual movie Slay the Dragon with Texas Civil Rights Project, and 30 attended the Brennan Center for Justice event about the Freedom to Vote and John Lewis Voting Rights Acts. Dozens contributed funding to

these important voting rights coalition partners. Restrictive laws passed by the legislature including barriers to voting by mail, voter ID requirements, and attempts to purge voter rolls caused more than 20,000 votes to not be counted in primary elections of 2022. First UU will engage people in a get-out-the-vote campaign and hire a part-time voting organizer during the '22-23 fiscal year. A voter registration team of over 30 members already staff ongoing events with Project Row Houses and the League of Women Voters.

Refugee and Immigration Rapid Responses

Generous contributions allow a team of a dozen members to directly support migrant families, asylum seekers, and sponsor an Afghan refugee family. They took three Afghan families on their first outings to the Houston Zoo and the Houston Museum of Natural Science, transported clients to a community jobs fair, and connected a refugee who lost a leg in combat with specialty medical services who fitted him with a new prosthetic leg

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The Community Projects Team was active during COVID while employing CDC guidelines to protect our volunteers and recipients. During the past year, we expanded our outreach programs to meet the increased community needs. First UU Church has continued to fulfill our mission of “deeds, not creeds” through the projects listed below.

REGIONAL BLOOD CENTER (BLOODMOBILE)

When the Houston area experienced a critical shortage of blood during the pandemic, First UU members rallied to reduce this shortfall through quarterly blood collections. This helped when many companies could not organize blood drives, high school and college blood donation efforts shut down and many donation sites were not available. Blood supplies declined to a one-to-two-day inventory and elective surgeries were cancelled.



During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, First UU scheduled four blood drives. The Bloodmobile came to our church for donations: August 2, 2021: 17 donors; November 7, 2021: 12 donors; and February 27, 2022: 15 donors. A fourth blood drive is scheduled for June 19. Many additional UUs regularly donate blood at a more convenient time or location closer to their homes.

REBUILDING TOGETHER HOUSTON (RTH)

For 40 years, Rebuilding Together Houston has been the only organization in our region to provide home repairs to hundreds of low income homeowners. With more than 14,650 neighbors served, RTH has averaged one family day, each

day for 40 years. This repair work adds 20 years or more to the life of a home, making it safer and more resilient against the weather and disasters. Community volunteers including First UU and licensed contractors repair the homes of low-income elderly, U.S. Military Veterans, and working families in need. This work improves the safety and structure of homes that are passed from generation to generation, helping to retain the character of Houston neighborhoods by keeping families in communities that they helped to build.

Last fall, Rebuilding Together Houston resumed its volunteer program after being shut down for a year due to COVID. About 20 First UU volunteers donated their time and home repair skills to rebuild one home in October 2021. A second house was also repaired in April 2022.

Community PROJECTS TEAM **cpt**

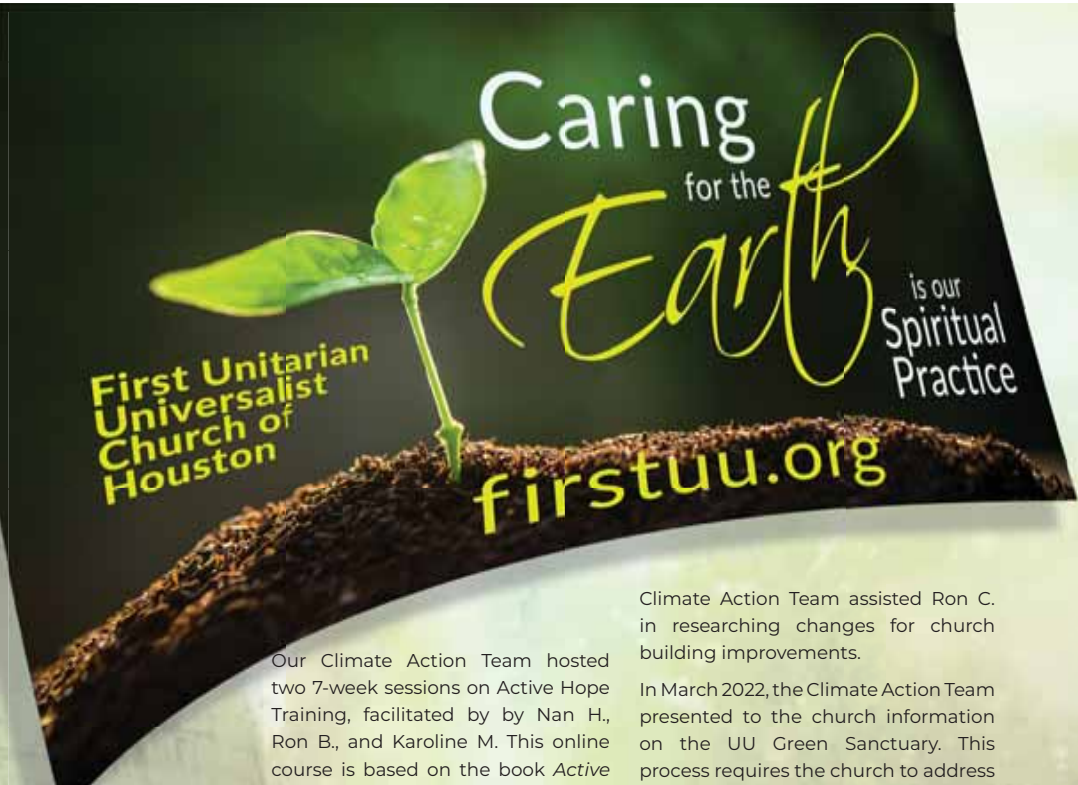


RUTHERFORD B.H. YATES MUSEUM

One more time, this is the largest project of the Community Projects Team focused on the preservation and expansion of the Yates Museum in Freedmen's Town. Located in the Fourth Ward just outside of downtown Houston, we are taking a holistic approach by providing a wide range of resources including consultation, house preservation, project management, fundraising, marketing, public relations, etc. First UU Church volunteers provided a range of services from museum house restorations, board membership, office staffing and fundraising.

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cat CLIMATE ACTION TEAM

Our Climate Action Team hosted two 7-week sessions on Active Hope Training, facilitated by Nan H., Ron B., and Karoline M. This online course is based on the book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* by Johanna Macy and Chris Johnstone.

In November, 2021, the Climate Action Team asked for the Board's endorsement of the Carbon Fee and Dividend bill, promoted by the Citizen's Climate Lobby. The Board voted in favor of this endorsement.

On a Saturday in November, First UU had 11 volunteers at the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department's tree planting event in Townwood Park, on Sims Bayou, First UU Church volunteers were part of a larger group of environmental non-profit and city volunteers.

Climate Action Team assisted Ron C. in researching changes for church building improvements.

In March 2022, the Climate Action Team presented to the church information on the UU Green Sanctuary. This process requires the church to address three areas: 1) Mitigation to drawdown emissions, 2) improve adaptation and resilience, and 3) Step toward justice. When starting new projects, the UUA asks us to consider projects related to these three goals, taking action on both in-house and overall community projects. The Board discussed the possibility of taking steps to become accredited. A decision was made to discuss this further in the Fall, once the church completes its new Vision and Mission work.

Our Green Revolution and Climate Teams planned a few events leading up to Earth Day

including a group bike ride in Hermann Park, two vegan dinners at Megan & Edmund's home, and a Sunday display engaging and encouraging members and friends to reduce their carbon footprint. Vegan recipes, vegetable plant give-away, lessons for youth and children on greening the planet and a gardening session for children were all part of the Spring offers. Several members also created Earth Day videos enjoyed by congregants, participated in Discovery Green's Earth Day with a UU "Rags to Bags" re-using/recycling project, and participated

in Interfaith Environmental Network's Willow Waterhole planting event.

In April 2022, Climate Action Team members and Green Revolution Team members decided to combine into one group, under the name "Climate Action Team". Each year, Spring engagements will be called "Green Revolution".



	2021-2022	2022-2023
110 – Pledge Income	\$ 530,000	\$ 625,394
115 – Inspiration Sunday	\$ 16,000	\$ 16,000
116 – Endowment Draw	\$ 32,410	\$ 33,682
120 – Offering (Total)	\$ 56,000	\$ 61,000
130 – Services Auction	\$ 35,500	\$ 40,500
140 – Fundraising Team	\$ 12,500	\$ 13,500
150 – Gifts	\$ 24,000	\$ 56,000
160 – Rental Income	\$ 94,500	\$ 78,400
170 – Reserve Fund Draw	\$ 81,569	\$ 50,000
180 – Other Income	\$ 1,500	\$ 31,500
100 – TOTAL INCOME	\$ 883,979	\$ 1,005,976
FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS		
210 – Dues	\$ 37,159	\$ 37,493
230 – Financial Fees	\$ 4,991	\$ 4,991
240 – Endowment Transfer	\$ 3,600	\$ 3,600
200 – Total Financial Obligations	\$ 45,750	\$ 46,084
PROGRAM		
310 – Religious Education	\$ 2,100	\$ 5,450
320 – Leadership	\$ 3,800	\$ 3,800
330 – Music	\$ 9,900	\$ 12,700
340 – Membership & Publicity	\$ 4,250	\$ 15,450
360 – Social Justice	\$ 37,292	\$ 55,990
370 – Welcome Team	\$ 2,800	\$ 3,300
380 – Worship	\$ 10,500	\$ 15,373
390 – Stewardship	\$ 2,800	\$ 2,800
300 – Total Programs	\$ 73,442	\$ 114,863
FACILITIES		
420 – Maintenance	\$ 39,950	\$ 36,950
430 – Insurance	\$ 27,920	\$ 18,000
440 – Utilities	\$ 34,841	\$ 42,841
450 – Office	\$ 16,970	\$ 18,000
400 – Total Facilities	\$ 119,681	\$ 115,791
500 – Personnel Expense	\$ 645,106	\$ 729,239
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 883,979	\$ 1,005,976
SUMMARY		
Total Income	\$ 883,979	\$ 1,005,976
Total Expense	\$ 883,979	\$ 1,005,976

2022-2023 Budget

**FIRST UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
CHURCH OF
HOUSTON**

2022-2023 BUDGET
\$ 1,005,976

2021-2022 MEMBERSHIP

Fifteen new members have joined First UU Church since January 1, 2022.

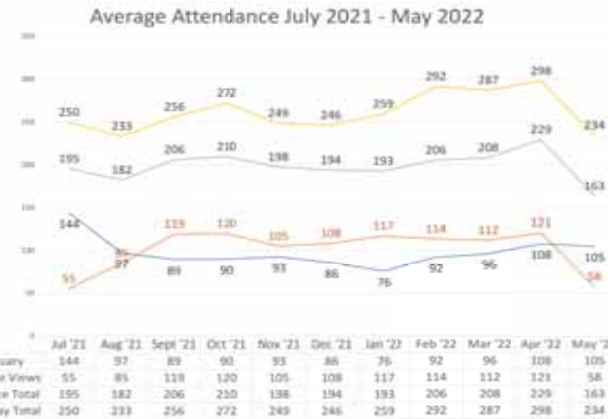
15

305

Total membership as of May 30, 2022

295

Total membership as of Dec. 31, 2021



In-Person & Online ATTENDANCE

COMMUNICATIONS Report

	Dec 2021	May 2022
Subscribers/Followers		
Digital Newsletter	1,463	1,467
YouTube	3,110	5,086
Facebook	14,947	18,344
Instagram	396	411
Twitter	274	281
Website		
	Jan-Dec '21	Jan-May '22
Visits	166,634	107,282
Unique Visitors	61,126	25,318

Most Viewed Videos from 2021-2022

HOPE GRATITUDE
2001 views

Prayer
966 views

UNEXPECTED
876 views

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BOARD REPORT

FROM PAGE 2

for building renovation.

Laura has already met with staff, volunteers, the Facilities Team and the Board to gather input about our needs for building use and create what she calls “a living document” – an initial draft. The next step will be a presentation to the congregation, with several opportunities for input, feedback, and suggestions. Our ongoing work to discern the mission and vision of FUUCH will enable us to revise and update the plan. We will formulate a blueprint for a facility that will equip us to live into that vision and mission and create the legacy for tomorrow that we dream together.

Improving Board Communication

The Board began the year with a renewed commitment to finding better ways to improve communication between the board, staff, and congregation. A variety of approaches had been tried in the past with limited effectiveness. We knew the success of our Developmental Ministry depended on finding better solutions. One of the solutions came from a most unexpected place: Zoom! Many of us were skeptical about the usefulness of virtual meeting platforms prior to Covid, but necessity was definitely the moth-

er of innovation in this case.

In addition to introducing the monthly Board Chat, we held several informational meetings and conversations via Zoom. Zoom allows us to offer multiple opportunities for members to participate at different times, and has proven especially helpful for parents, people who do not live close to church, and those who do not yet feel comfortable attending in person. While zoom will never completely replace in-person meetings, the Board will certainly continue to offer Zoom gatherings.

We also held several in-person conversations with the congregation. Some were informational and listening sessions, others were opportunities for us to share and process thoughts and feelings together. All conversations were meaningful, with congregation and Board members alike expressing appreciation for the opportunities to strengthen relationships and trust. We plan to continue hosting these dialogues as we move forward together.

Developmental Ministry Goals

Multi-Site Model

What is our vision for multi-site?

After Members of the Thoreau Campus voted to create an in-

dependent congregation last spring, we successfully reached an agreement in February on the sale of the Clayhead Road property to the new congregation. We expect to have finished closing before the annual meeting. We are thankful to have reached resolution and wish the new Thoreau Congregation well as they begin this new stage of their journey.

Mission/Vision/Covenant

What kind of church do we want to become?

While we didn't know we were doing it, the pandemic provided the opportunity for us to start figuring out who we are and what kind of church we want to be as we thought about what services we needed to provide, to whom, and how we would do it. The ways in which we worked together, the services and gatherings that we maintained during the shutdown, the ones we added, and how we chose to reopen speak to who we are, what is important to us, and where we see ourselves going.

We focused on providing accurate and interesting information on social justice topics through the minister's forums. We launched the Spanish language ministry – which has brought several members into more active involvement and attracted new ones.

We maintained our commitment to the Yates Museum and Rebuilding Together Houston.

We kept children and families engaged through online RE and family gathering times. Our middle and high school students stuck together and encouraged one another through the challenges and stress of pandemic isolation via virtual meetings and outdoor gatherings. We kept singing. When circumstances allowed, we held memorials for those lost during the pandemic, offering their loved ones a much-needed time to say good-bye. We made new connections with like-minded organizations in our community through our work with The Metropolitan Organization (TMO). We welcomed members of the greater Houston community to our campus to attend music concerts, forums, and other offerings. We took important steps towards reducing our carbon footprint by greening the building and providing information and ideas for members to take home and apply to their own lives. And when the news came out from the Supreme Court, we marched for reproductive justice.

The Mission, Vision, and Covenant Committee may have officially kicked off this important

work on Covenant Sunday, but it had already begun.

Governance, Ministry, and Administration

How can we have a healthy relationship with our Senior Minister and with the UUA?

For most members, the entire conversation about governance and what it has to do with the relationship with our minister or the UUA is mostly foreign, because most members have never been on a board of directors at the church or anywhere else. We have sought to shed some light on what the Board does, and why our governance change was important.

Adopting new principles of governance was only the first step. Putting them into practice has been the focus this year. We didn't get it all right the first time (this is shocking news, I know), but we made real progress. Changes included holding the annual Board planning retreat in February rather than in the fall, prior to the development of the budget; working with the senior minister to write an annual plan for ministry and assess the success of the past year's plan; engaging in mutual self-assessment with the senior minister, and adopting new Rules for Conduct of Activities of the Board (akin to Robert's Rules of Order).

CONTINUES ON PAGE 30



Weekly Programs

Sunday Discussion Circle met weekly with an average of 13 participants. Leaders met every month to choose topics and get volunteers to facilitate. A wide-range of topics covered included racism, health & wellness, aging, finding meaning and understanding on the war in Ukraine.

An average of eight participants attended the weekly Wednesday Discussions by Zoom. A wide variety of topics were discussed including race relations, contemporary personal and political issues such as wellness, hope, healing, democracy, the good life and climate change.

Sunday Mindful Meditation met weekly via Zoom and have no plans to meet in person in the near future. Regular attendance was eight. Music, guided meditations are included on various topics such as relieving anxiety, mindfulness, loving kindness and compassion, stress and relaxation.

The Soul to Soul Covenant Group met last summer during six-ses-

sions and explored topics from the book *Soul to Soul: Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing* (Robinson & Hawkins), such as compassion, shadow and boundaries.

Other Adult Groups

Each month, the Games Night for Adults Group met online until May when the group began meeting in person again. Average attendance of 11. Games enjoyed included Jack Box games online and in person: Monopoly Deal Card Game, Uno, Pandemic Game and Pictionary.

Changing Women Group has continued online and has been very successful with an average of 12 participants each week.

The Early Morning Book Group continues to read non-fiction books about philosophy, religion, and other topics. The group draws about six regular attendees. Books read this year include: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson, *The Soil Will Save Us* by Kristin Ohlson, *A Short History of Reconstruction* by Foner, Eric, *Train in Winter* by Caroline Moorehead, *The Great Warming* by Brian

Fagan, *The Economies of Cities* by Jane Jacobs, *Let The People Pick The President* by Jesse Wegman, *The American Way Of Poverty* by Sasha Abramsky, *An End to Suffering* by Pankaj Mishra

The String Band, with leader, Lydia L., stopped meeting by zoom and started meeting in-person a couple of times a month. They provided music for two services and the special event, A Celebration of Music.

Our Garden Team, led by Hazel H., has continued to water, weed, compost and remove trash from the area almost on a daily basis. The Garden Team has helped the garden survive all seasons and organized a planting day for new Spring plants. Children participated in planting, weeding, and learning about worms and compost.

Also, our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Group, led by Georgette D. met for half the year on line and has stopped meeting for now, awaiting a special project of putting together a service.

SPANISH MINISTRY



El Grupo de Planificación de los servicios en español está formado por el Rvdo. y Dr. Colin Bossen, la Dra. Jolie Locke, Manuel Q., Maru F., Edmund P. y Alma Viscarra. Nuestro agradecimiento a todos ellos por los esfuerzos realizados en la producción de estos primeros servicios en español.

The Spanish Service Planning Group is formed by the Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen, Dr. Jolie Locke, Manuel Q., Maru F., Edmund P., and Alma Viscarra. Our appreciation to all of them for efforts made in producing these first Spanish services.

RE ... FROM PAGE 9

Leadership for Religious Education & Family Ministry

This year, as part of our mission, our RE Leaders Circle has been meeting quarterly, focusing on bringing the leadership of religious education to parents at home. We also are creating a set of questions to review our Spirit Play stories through the lens of misappropriation.

Continuing Education for Director of Religious Community

Carol Burrus, who coordinates all religious education in the church, continued her work in the Credentialing Program for Religious Educators, (UUA and LREDA -Liberal Religious Educators Association) She completed all nine required competencies and met with the credentialing committee on April 30, 2022. She also attended the Southwest LREDA monthly meetings and LREDA conferences.

FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF HOUSTON

were presented for approval. Upon motion duly made by Craig Oettinger and seconded by Ron Cookston, the congregation voted by a show of hands to approve the minutes as written. There were no abstentions nor objections.

5. **Presentation from the Board.** Kelly Brown reviewed accomplishments of the past year, and the progress made on the congregation's Developmental Ministry Goals. Regarding our goal of examining the multi-site model and how it may best serve all going forward, Mr. Brown reported that a group of members, who primarily attend the Thoreau/Richmond campus, indicated an interest in forming an independent congregation in Fort Bend County. A poll was conducted in May resulting in 57 members indicating their interest in creating a new, independent congregation. The Board is currently negotiating the terms of the separation, which will hopefully be concluded by June 30, 2021. Mr. Brown emphasized that this outcome is similar to the outcome of the Tapestry congregation's decision to become an independent congregation, and is considered as a success for the multi-site model.
6. **Presentation from the Senior Minister.** In accordance with the new Policy of Governance, adopted by the Board in August, 2020, the Reverend Dr. Colin Bossen presented the Senior Minister's Annual Plan for Ministry, which includes moving to in-person, livestreamed services beginning July 11.

FROM PAGE 7

7. **Approval of Candidates.** Kelly Brown presented the following slates of candidates for approval:

Board of Directors:

Chris Scott
Lauri Zuchlewski

Nominating Committee:

Penny Cerling
Dick Doughty
Linda Richardson

Upon motion duly made by Johanna De Young, and seconded by Jeff Skarda the congregation voted unanimously by a show of hands to approve the candidates. There were no abstentions nor objections.

8. **Presentation of the Budget.** Kelly Brown presented the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget to the congregation. Several members were recognized to ask questions. After 10 minutes, upon motion duly made by David Wurdlow and seconded by Jan Elias, the congregation voted unanimously by a show of hands to extend discussion for 10 more minutes.
9. **Adjournment.** Upon motion duly made by Peggy Harvey and seconded by Michael Morrison, the congregation voted unanimously to end discussion and adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 2:16 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Ruth Hoffman-Lach, Board Vice President

SENIOR MINISTER

FROM PAGE 5

Alongside these efforts to clarify who we are as a congregation, we are considering holding a capital campaign next spring. Our facilities need significant upgrades. Building the Legacy of Tomorrow will also require addressing some much-differed physical maintenance and improvements to campus. Look in the Board President's letter for more details!

In all, I am certain that it is going to be an exhilarating time to be a part of First Houston! And I would be remiss not to share my deep appreciation for all who helped the congregation to this point. While the last two and half years have been difficult, First Houston has benefited from some extraordinary lay leadership who have helped position us to flourish at a time when religious communities around the country are struggling. It would be impossible to thank everyone. I do want, however, lift up two groups whose

wisdom and steady hands have empowered me to help the congregation navigate through these times. These are the people who have served as Board President or Vice President throughout the pandemic: Kelly Brown, Ron Cookston, Ruth Hoffman-Lach, and Carolyn Leap. And the members of our Health Advisory Group: Joan Bitar, Deborah Bozek, Johanna DeYoung, Kim Waller, and Carl Walther.

A final note of appreciation must go to the fine staff. Each week they work incredibly hard to make sure that we have spiritually uplifting worship, transformative religious education for children and youth, meaningful adult programs, and a strong voice for social justice. I am blessed to work with them and to serve you!

love,
Colin

"First Houston has a wonderful legacy. As a congregation we can and should be proud of what this community has done in the past. For close to 125 years, we have made a significant difference in the lives of our membership and in the region."

The Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen
Senior Minister

BOARD REPORT

FROM PAGE 27

The Governance Committee provided guidance, developed assessment and planning instruments, wrote the new Rules of Conduct, planned and presented two retreats, wrote the necessary amendments needed to correct our formation documents, and began creating a process for on-boarding new members, among other things.

The Personnel Committee completely rewrote the personnel handbook – a huge undertaking that was part of our effort to improve the relationship with staff, ensure that we provide a safe and healthy work environment, and provide fair, equitable compensation.

Multiculturalism, Anti-racism, and Inclusion

How can we increase diversity in our church and work to dismantle white supremacy?

The Board created the Transformation Committee to guide the congregation in its discernment of the 8th Principle and advise the Board on potential changes in governance, staffing, and accountability. This committee would help align FUUCH's institutional framework with it. Formed with leadership and members representing diversity in age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, committee members have been involved in research and learning

together and in January 2023, will begin a membership-wide inquiry into the meaning and implications of adopting the 8th Principle.

This January, we hired Dr. Jolie Rocke as Acting Director of Music. Dr. Rocke has experience directing, producing, and teaching a vastly diverse and inclusive spectrum of music, musicians, and programs. In addition to infusing our Sunday morning services with music from different faith traditions and communities, she has already coordinated and directed two excellent public concerts at FUUCH: Singing HERstory, and I am in Need of Music. Both programs not only provided beautiful music from diverse traditions but were also inviting to members of the larger Houston community.

Rev. Dr. Bossen and Sadé Perkins were awarded a fellowship by Princeton University to study the History of Religion in Houston's Pan-African Community. They have already presented three of ten scheduled interviews and oral histories with leaders from across the spectrum of Houston's African American religious communities, each one has attracted a diverse audience, many of whom have inquired about and visited First UU as a result of attendance.

Growth and Membership Engagement

More people should be here with us — how do we engage them?

While nobody expected it, part of the answer to this question has been offering high-quality, livestreamed and recorded programs. Several of our new members found us first online, began attending virtually, and then came to meet us in person. Staff have been helping visitors make connections through programs like the Inquirer's Series, New Member Covenant Groups, and the Spanish Language program.

We have been introducing ourselves to Houstonians in a variety of ways – through collaborations with neighbor organizations like the Freedman's Town Farmer's Market, and TMO, hosting interesting and informative forums and music concerts, and maintaining our Black Lives Matter vigil on Fannin St.

As of May 5, First UU has more households making financial contributions than we did a year ago, before the members at Thoreau formed their own congregation. At a time when most American churches of all denominations, including UU's have been declining in membership, First UU has grown.

If someone wrote a book about the past year at First Church, it would be titled Developmental Ministry in the Midst of a Pandemic: Be Sure to Bring Your Flexibility! Some of the chapters would be "To Sing or Not to Sing? That is the question," "Teaching Boomers to Zoom," and "Always have a Plan B, C, D, and E." We could not have predicted so many blessings would come from such a tumultuous year, but here we are. As we move forward together, I hope we will continue to imagine with abandon, greet unexpected events as opportunities, and above all, weave the larger, more diverse and inviting tapestry of love in action that Houston needs. That is our legacy for the future.

Blessed Be.



BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR

FROM PAGE 13

beautiful wives (Ruth Hoffman-Lach and Mary K.) to assist. They were able to refinish the sanctuary's redwood paneling, retille several areas, paint, lighting/installation of light fixtures, removed problem greenery in playground, etc. Thanks Team!!!

The largest portion of the RRC funds (\$117,000) was used to replace four of the AC units that had gone out during the summer. We were then tasked with "repiping" the entire Women's bathroom (due to large tree roots on the Southmore side of the church destroying all of the underground pipes), completed the sanctuary camera installation, rewired faulty electrical wiring, replaced the kitchen stove (painted and added décor), returned program funds that were borrowed for previous facilities' needs, welded handrails both inside and outside, painted walls on all three floors, addressed the parking situation, provided security, extended the hours of our Media Technician, obtained master plan of church, hired PACE engineer, and, most importantly, positioned the congregation so that we could take advantage of all the positive outreach we have done.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this important effort!!!

I am excited about the second part of the RRC! Great changes are headed your way. Stay tuned for opportunities to weigh in on the additional upgrades of our church campus.

Finances

I am pleased to report that the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) Loan received in May 2020 has been 100 percent forgiven as of 10/18/2021! This was the loan the Small Business Administration (SBA) extended to First Church in the amount of \$93,140 to assist small businesses in retaining employees during the pandemic. All funds were used on payroll expenditures, which was the initial requirement for loan forgiveness.

As many of you are aware, the Thoreau campus decided to separate from the main campus last year. The final details will be provided to the congregation once the process has been completed. The expenditures associated with maintaining the Thoreau campus were not included in last year's budget and continue to accrue.

You will find last year's budget, as well as the upcoming 2022-2023 Annual Budget

on page 22. The 2022 Annual Meeting scheduled for June 5, 2022.

In closing, I would like to give a special thank you to our supportive Members & Friends, the dedicated staff, led by the amazing Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen, our outstanding Board of Directors, the exceptional volunteers, Mary-Ann C. and Ms. Connie A. (our office volunteers), Elizabeth A. for donating her handmade hollowed-stemmed chalices to all our new members; Rev. Leonora Montgomery (who I like to think of as our "church mother"), and mostly our Board President, Ruth Hoffman-Lach and Vice President, Ron Cookston. I do not have enough space to list their contributions to First Church over the past year. The dedication we have as staff is extreme, but we are also motivated by a bimonthly paycheck. Ruth & Ron have given so selflessly over the last year, that I feel a thank you is not nearly enough. I pray that God has a special blessing for people like them.

Love & Thanks,
Tawanna Grice

JCC REPORT

FROM PAGE 17

at no cost! They volunteered at temporary Haitian shelters, cooked food and prepared gift baskets, distributed personal hygiene products and clothing, arranged school bus transportation, and procured computers and phones. Our active threads of love and action envelope people of the world with dignity and compassion, while strengthening bonds with Northwoods UU Church, Interfaith Ministries, Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative, Organización Latina Trans and Casa Juan Diego community partners.

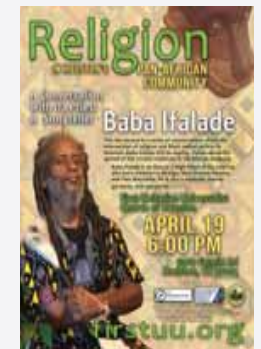
Side with Love means we show up for LGBTQ+ and Women's rights!

Texas appears to know no bounds when it comes to repressing transgendered minors' rights and women's reproductive freedoms. First UU members of the state action network Texas UU Justice Ministry Advisory Council testified against the legislation. Unfortunately, in January SB 29 went into effect, requiring

transgender student-athletes to compete on sports teams that match their sex assigned at birth. Then in January, the governor issued a directive attempting to restrict trans minors' access to gender-affirming care by labeling it as child abuse. Although not legally binding, the chilling effect cannot be ignored. Rev. Cooper led a panel discussion in April 2022.

And with women's reproductive rights under threat by the SCOTUS and passage of SB8 – the Texas Heartbeat Act, Thirty UU's joined thousands protesting at the Women's March, October 2. First UU joined numerous congregations across the state to receive Just Texas Reproductive Freedom Congregation designation.

While summarizing the achievements of the Justice Coordinating Council for the year, it barely highlights all the individual efforts by First UU members who take social justice action every day on issues facing our community and world. We hope it inspires you to join in our work next year!



COMMUNITY PROJECTS TEAM

FROM PAGE 19



During the past year, First UU Church donated shared offerings and separate member gifts of several thousand dollars to accelerate restoration efforts. Our carpenter and painter team worked over 50 separate days with an average of about eight volunteers each workday. This large team effort also required many days of project management.

Why are we making such a huge investment in this project to preserve these historic structures situated in Freedmen's Town? Because it fits with First UU Church's focus on racial justice and building racial bridges in Houston and beyond. This is the only remaining urban neighborhood in the United States founded by former slaves and their descendants. The six Yates Museum houses are Texas State Historic Landmarks and are registered in the National Records. Two houses are Sites of Memory Associated to the UNESCO - Slave Route. Other Yates Houses are pending approval of this designation.

Two structures in particular, the Nixon and Lewis houses, have garnered most of our attention and labor. Much of the original materials as it is practical, are utilized in restoring these homes. Our preservation efforts for the Nixon House included comprehensive interior

repairs, total house rewiring and installation of its first central air conditioning and heating system. Preservation of the Lewis House was initiated with new floors, walls and ceilings as well as a new foundation, roof, exterior painting, and front and back porch restoration.

MONTROSE GRACE PLACE

Due to the COVID-19 protocols, we provided a catered dinner instead of a volunteer-prepared dinner to vulnerable, homeless LBGTQ+ youth. The fifth Thursday of each month, the youth arrive seeking nourishment and a positive environment. All volunteers must be at least 25 years of age and pass a background check.

EMERGENCY AID COALITION (EAC)

Several First UU Church members volunteer at the EAC sorting and arranging wearing apparel, preparing grocery bags and assembling toiletry kits. More than 100 clients per week benefit from these efforts. First UU Church members at both services delivered food donations directly to the EAC with the annual Thanksgiving Day Parade on November 2021 and the Easter Day Parade on April 2022.

CHILDREN AT RISK AND CHILD ADVOCATES

These organizations are dedicated to breaking the life cycle of child abuse through a

court-appointed, special advocate system. Our members donate new toys and clothes to the children at Christmas. In December 2021, First UU members were very generous and kind. A total of 306 contributors donated 269 items and \$945 in gift cards. This year, members' participation was much larger.

HOUSTON FOOD BANK

Throughout the year, First UU Church members donate money and food for the hungry, especially during and after disasters.

MEAL PACKS FOR THE HOMELESS

On February 27, 2022, the CP Team partnered with RE children to make Meal Packs for the Homeless. The church office has a need for the meal packs as the homeless come to First UU asking for food. First UU members also like to have these meal packs available in their cars to give to the homeless. Meal packs were also provided to the EAC.

ANSWER NEPAL

This non-profit provides primary school to college education to disadvantaged, low caste, high-performing students across Nepal. Hundreds of Unitarian Universalists across the US sponsor this educational program. Currently, ANSWER has 650 students in over 100 private schools and colleges in Nepal. Many of these students are competitive with, and even outperform, those of higher castes. ANSWER provides an opportunity for upward mobility



of its marginalized students who enter professional careers such as medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, accountants, entrepreneurs and business executives. Since girls are underrepresented in Nepal, especially in private schools and higher education, 75 percent of ANSWER's students are girls.

At First UU Church more than a dozen members sponsored students before our recent 2022 additions. Individual sponsors select the children they wish to support and mentor through school, befriending them through their formative years.

ANSWER Nepal was the recipient of the Shared Offering on Sundays April 3 and April 10. The Community Projects Team used this ANSWER visibility to sign up sponsors for an additional seven students. ANSWER Nepal was particularly appreciative after the program crunch caused by COVID.

INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON

Interfaith Ministries provides weekly, delivered meals to vulnerable and isolated seniors. First UU Church assists with meal delivery to these seniors and with the aniMeals on Wheels program. The aniMeals program was founded to help feed these seniors' four-

legged friends, preventing seniors from feeling compelled to share their very-limited food resources with their pets. On March 27, 2022 First UU collected dog and cat food, divided the pet food into smaller bags with help from the RE children and delivered several hundred pounds of pet food to InterFaith Ministries.

PLANT IT FORWARD FARMS

This community partner offers economically-disadvantaged refugees the opportunity to become self-sufficient through growing, harvesting and selling produce from a sustainable, urban, micro-farm within the city. Our volunteers help maintain established refugee garden plots at an assigned location. There was a Fall Fundraiser for this charity on October 23, 2021.

PLANT TREES FOR THE CLIMATE

We partnered with the City of Houston to plant trees at several parks. On Saturday, November 2, 2021, twelve UU volunteers out of 24 planted almost 1000 trees at Townwood Park on Simsbrook Dr. It was perfect weather for tree planting at Townwood Park. Sunny with temperatures in the 60s. The Parks Dept. dug the holes with an auger and dropped the trees off at

the holes. We also scheduled tree planting on Saturday, December 18 at MacGregor Park, but unfortunately it was cancelled due to possible thunderstorms.

RECLAIM OUR VOTE

Volunteers assist the Justice Coordinating Council in signing up voters who might have been removed from voter rolls and in providing information on voting registration deadlines.

PROJECT ROW HOUSES

First UU Church is involved with Project Row Houses through our Healthy Parenting Signature Project, providing tutoring, mentoring, and nurturing childcare to program participants. The Community Projects Team supports this effort with construction/maintenance projects requested by Project Row Houses.

WILLOW WATERHOLE GREENSPACE CONSERVANCY

This park offers recreational opportunities as well as flood control during Houston's heavy rainfalls. The area includes walking trails and gazebos. Volunteers help mulch, prune and plant trees along with litter pick-up to help maintain this preserve for the enjoyment of the community. On April 4, 2022,



GALLERY

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GALLERY



**Thank you,
First UU Church
Members and Friends**



**FIRST UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
CHURCH OF
HOUSTON**

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