



*The Reverend Pirate Jessica Rodela*



*Tom Nagy hosting the Dream Auction*



*Pamela Rojas's art in the nursery*



*The Hokey Pokey for Rev. Jess's 15th anniversary*



*Board President Wendy Martin as Uni*



*Faces of GRU*



*The GRU chalice at Christmas*

# Annual Report 2023

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January 27, 2024

Editor: Kristen Wilson

## Official Membership List

As of January 2024. Total: 144

1. Ghazaal AHMADI
2. Danielle ALBERT
3. Erika ALI
4. Jim ANDERSON
5. June ANDERSON
6. Sarah ANDERSON
7. Erin ASPENLIEDER
8. Kemeny BABINEAU
9. Irena BALTADUONIS
10. Jessica BAYNE
11. Ryan BAYNE
12. Jane BELL
13. Ed BENNETT
14. Brenda BISSELL
15. Bobbie BLEILER
16. Betty BOOMER
17. Carole BOUCHER
18. Adam BRAHA
19. Carol BURROWS
20. Michele CADOTTE
21. Carolyn  
CARNAHAN
22. David CARNAHAN
23. Tonnea  
CARRE-HILTON
24. Greg CARTER
25. Olivia CASEMORE
26. Aislinn CLANCY
27. Janis COLLINS
28. Anne DAHMER
29. Sky DASEY
30. Andrea DEERING  
NAGY
31. Mike  
DEQUETTEVILLE
32. Lee DICKEY
33. Jonathan  
DIETRICH
34. Bob DOERING
35. Janet DOUMA
36. Curtis DUECK
37. Martin EDMONDS
38. Ida FISHER
39. Ellen FORRESTER
40. Jackie FORSTER
41. Doug FYFE
42. Ruth GILBERT
43. Penny GRACE
44. John GREEN
45. Theresa HANLEY
46. Dianne HEISE  
BENNETT
47. Jack HORMAN
48. Mag HORMAN
49. Lee  
HORTON-CARTER
50. Neil HUNT
51. Jennifer HUNTER
52. Robert HUNTER
53. Charlotte INNERD
54. Margaret INSLEY
55. Kathie KEEFE
56. David KELLER
57. Jane KELLER
58. Wendy KENNEDY
59. Ian KENT
60. Mavis KERR
61. Judith KOELLER
62. Kathy  
KOENDERINK
63. Karen LILL
64. Steve LILL
65. Lisa LINDSAY
66. Catherine LIZOTTE
67. Lynda MACLEOD
68. Denise MARIGOLD
69. Wendy MARTIN
70. Alisa MCCLURG
71. Richard MCCLURG
72. Boyd MCDONALD
73. Lyn MCGINNIS
74. Ian MCGREGOR
75. Lynda MCKIM
76. Albert MENSAH
77. Pauline MENSAH
78. Jay MICHELA
79. Dennis MIGHTON
80. Pat MIGHTON
81. Bey MILLER
82. Brenda MOEN
83. Doug MOEN
84. Jay MOORE
85. Kathy MOSTARDI
86. Tom NAGY
87. Margaret NEIGH
88. Corliss OLSON
89. Ellen PAPENBURG
90. Susan PATTERSON
91. Leo PETIPAS
92. Kay PFISTERER
93. Art PHELAN
94. Nanci PHELAN
95. Asha PHILAR
96. Leanne PINCURA  
O'NEIL
97. Tim PINCURA  
O'NEIL
98. Stephen PREECE
99. Colin READ
100. Rebekah REMPEL
101. Adrienne  
RICHTER
102. Bruce RICHTER
103. Evelyn RICHTER
104. Dorothy RILEY
105. Nicholas  
RINTCHE
106. Sue RIVARD
107. Kathy  
ROBERTSON
108. Norm  
ROBERTSON
109. Melissa  
ROCKENFIELD
110. Jessica Purple  
RODELA

111. Pamela ROJAS	126. Mike SZARKA	137. Beth WILSON
112. Lynn RUBINSTEIN	127. Tracey SZARKA	138. Cait WILSON
113. Joanne RYDER	128. Renny	139. Jamie WILSON
114. Richard RUSSEK	TALIANCHICH	140. Jane WILSON
115. Jim SANNES	129. Julie TAYLOR	141. Jeff WILSON
116. Mel SCHOLZ	130. Helga TEWFIK	142. Kristen WILSON
117. Cathy SCOTT	131. Tui TORRIE	143. Sophie WILSON
118. Russell SCOTT	132. Anna VALLENTIN	144. Scotte ZINN
119. Kimiko SHIBATA	133. Christa VAN	
120. Gregg SIMMONS	DAELE	
121. Louise SIMS	134. Julian VAN	
122. Diana SMITH	MOSSEL-	
123. Anders STJÄRNE	FORRESTER	
124. Erin STJÄRNE	135. Becky VERDUN	
125. Maca SUAZO	136. Susan WILLMOTT	

## **Agenda for the Annual General Meeting, February 25, 2024**

1. Welcome and Chalice Lighting (2 minutes)
2. Appointment of Parliamentarian and Timekeeper; Review of Meeting Rules (5 minutes)
3. Verification of Quorum (2 minutes)
4. Approval of Agenda (2 minutes)
5. Approval of AGM 26 February 2023 Minutes (2 minutes)
6. Acceptance of Reports (2 minutes)
7. Appointment of Financial Reviewer (3 minutes)
8. Budget Report (10 minutes)
9. Motion to Approve 2024 Budget (15 minutes)
10. Motion to affirm Colin Read as Lay Chaplain (2 minutes)
11. Motion to appoint Delegates to the Annual Meeting of the CUC (2 minutes)
  - a. The Board moves that the congregation appoint [names to be announced] as their delegates to the CUC Annual General Meeting
12. Nominations and Election of Trustees to the Board: Nominating Committee (5 minutes)
  - a. Motion: We appoint Neil Hunt, Becky Verdun, Jamie Wilson and Margaret Insley as Trustees to the Board for 2 year terms
  - b. We appoint Wendy Martin as Trustee to the Board for a 1 year term

13. Thanks and Closing Words (2 minutes)
14. Adjournment

## **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, February 26, 2023**

### **1. Welcome and Chalice Lighting (2 minutes)**

Welcome by Wendy Martin, chair with reading by Rev. Erik Walker Wikstrom.

### **2. Appointment of Parliamentarian and Timekeeper; Review of Meeting Rules (5 minutes)**

Margaret Insley, appointed as parliamentarian, Anne Dahmer as timekeeper. Margaret reviewed meeting rules.

### **3. Verification of Quorum (2 minutes)**

156 members; 47 members required for quorum. 75 members present; therefore, quorum was verified.

### **4. Approval of Agenda (2 minutes)**

Moved by Michael Lockhart; seconded by Steve Lill; motion passed.

### **5. Approval of AGM 27 February 2022 Minutes (2 minutes)**

Moved by Art Phelan; seconded by Colin Read; motion passed.

### **6. Acceptance of Reports (2 minutes)**

Moved Kate Urquhart; seconded by Kathy Mostardi; motion passed.

### **7. Appointment of Financial Reviewer (3 minutes)**

BDO Canada appointed; moved by Ian Kent; seconded by Anne Dahmer; motion passed.

### **8. Budget Report (10 minutes)**

Carol Burrows presented the budget report. This is a year of investment in GRU staff and programs. Many inflationary increases have raised operational costs.

### **9. Motion to Approve 2023 Budget (15 minutes)**

Moved by Board; seconded by Lynn Rubinstein.

Comment by Kathy Robertson, a thank you to everyone at GRU who helped us through the pandemic.

Question by Anna Vallentin, noticed a decrease in donations over last year and yet the proposed budget is \$200,000 for 2023. Why not a projected decreased amount of donations? Carol explained that there was a small reversal of the drop in donations

recently and there is some reason to hope we'll come closer to our proposed budget in 2023. Rev. Jess reminded us that increasing attendance, which is happening now, will bring increased donations.

Comment by Melissa Rockenfield, this church is a wonderful community and the Board has always been careful and thoughtful. We are quite secure financially in this community. Carol reminded us that we are a generous church who raised \$29,000 for refugee work.

Question by Jack Horman, asked if the CRA is unhappy with GRU for having such high cash reserves. Generally charitable entities shouldn't have high cash reserves. Carol said no there has been no issues raised. Comment by Lynn Rubinstein commented that she had previously worked with BDO and they would have raised the issue if it was a concern.

Motion passed.

**10. Motion to appoint Delegates to the Annual Meeting of the CUC (2 minutes)**

The Board moves that the congregation appoint Janis Collins, Wendy Martin, Jessica Bayne and Charlotte Innerd as their delegates to the CUC Annual Meeting.

- seconded by Michael Lockhart; motion passed.

**11. Nominations and Election of Trustees to the Board: Nominating Committee (5 minutes)**

· Motion: We appoint, Tim O'Neil and Susan Patterson as Trustees to the Board.

- Colin Read, chair of Nominating Committee, described the process and thanked Corliss and Cathy for their work on the board.

- seconded by Greg Carter; motion passed

**12. Thanks and Closing Words (2 minutes)**

Judith Koeller led a special 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary presentation for Rev. Jess. Judith reminded us that Jess has been guiding us for 15 years this April. She thanked Rev. Jess for strong leadership in changing times and the growth at GRU. She thanked Rev. Jess for inspiring us in so many ways and leading us forward. Rev. Jess was presented with flowers, a gift, and giant card signed by the congregation. Judith presented a slide show of scenes from Rev. Jess' time with us and there was a song of tribute to the tune of "Let's Do The Time Warp".

Closing words by Wendy Martin by Gordon B. McKeeman.

**13. Adjourned.**

## Minister's Report

Kimberly Debus, in her blog *Hold My Chalice*, writes “It’s okay if you came to a congregation seeking safety, comfort, and healing—and found out that it also offers (and asks for) accountability, challenging, and growing. It doesn’t mean the faith left you, it means the faith has met you where you were and now calls you to keep going.” Debus reminds us that “Unitarian Universalism meets you as you are but does not leave you as it found you—that this isn’t a haven so much as a grounding.”

Much has been written about the changing patterns of congregational life, and GRU is no exception as we continue in our recovery from the pandemic-era closures with shifting patterns in membership, attendance, pledging, and volunteerism. For some members, these disruptions understandably cause concern and distress. It is always a temptation to compare our current reality with our pre-pandemic trajectory, but I contend that it is a false (and pointless) comparison. Instead, I urge us to heed Parker Palmer’s advice: “when the going gets tough, turn to wonder.” I find hope in meeting challenges with courage, compassion, and curiosity. This is why I chose adrienne maree brown’s book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* as the overarching theme for Sunday services for the 2023-24 congregational year, following on last year’s theme, inspired by Thomas King’s *The Truth about Stories*, when I challenged us to “tell a new story” as we explore who we—as a congregation—want to become.

Early 2023 continued with a congregational year focused on stabilizing community connections by reclaiming and reframing pre-pandemic processes, policies, and programs including small groups, meditation, and our children’s programming. Rev. Victoria Ingram provided Sunday services and pastoral presence during my spring sabbatical while I focused on honing new writing skills and explored current trends in congregational life. I returned in time to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unitarian Flower Communion. For the 2023-24 GRU year I have shifted to prioritize newcomers and faith development with events like New UU, Conversation Starters, and Beyond Belief. In addition, I’ve been working toward relaunching OWL programming, encouraging more GRU presence at community social justice events (like the Interfaith Climate Vigils), and continuing the work of dismantling racism by encouraging awareness, honest reflection, and representation through programs like the *Darkness Divine* book study group. I’ve also continued supporting the Dream Auction team, the Lay Chaplaincy search, re-organizing and updating the GRU Children’s Library collection, and serving as an advisor for our Junior Youth Group (the TBDs). Among the year’s highlights was December’s multi-congregational “Church of the Imagination” Workshop with Liz James which I co-ordinated and co-hosted, which brought in 28 people, including UU guests from London, Guelph, and Stratford.

In the wider community, I retired from my long tenure on the Grand River Hospital’s Chaplaincy Education Advisory Board and returned to serve on the Mirth & Dignity Board (UU Hysterical Society). Since October I have been supporting the UU Ministers of Canada (UUMOC) in establishing the first official UU representation on the Interfaith

Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy. Much of my professional development centered around themes of these changing times, including the CUC's Uncolonizing Democracy workshops and other topics in dismantling racism, the UUMOC conference, Youth Advisor Training, and UUA forums on Article II (which reframes our UU principles), changing patterns in ministry, and intergenerational relevance.

Activist/artist adrienne maree brown says the first step toward realizing a better world is to imagine it. She writes: "Change is definitely going to happen, no matter what we plan or expect or hope for or set in place. We will adapt to that change, or we will become irrelevant." Over the past year GRU leaders and I have been asking: *if brown is right—that we are in an imagination battle—what might we dare dream for our congregation's future?* Your responses—at Water Communion, Canvass, and the "Church of the Imagination" workshop—have been creative and inspiring. I wonder what the future holds for us all, and I look forward to building toward your vision.







# Board Reports

## President's Report

When I reflect on my second year as board president, I find it difficult to sum up in a short report. There are many signs of recovery from the pandemic closures in recent months, but financial challenges remain. Throughout 2023, donations decreased while inflation continued to increase. In response, the Board has had to consider the question: by what benchmark do we measure our relative health and success after these years of disruption?

Some of our successes include:

- Increased attendance at in-person services, while continuing to provide a live stream and YouTube recordings for remote participation
- Continuation of our fUUnday children's program with the hire of new coordinator Izzy Kirby
- New small group meetings and workshops
- Improvements to building accessibility with automatic door installation
- Continuation of our 8th Principle and Dismantling Racism commitments
- Commitment to housing initiatives building a relationship and fundraising for A Better Tent City, Habitat for Humanity, and Community Justice Initiative
- Increased building rentals
- Music program expansion and new POP choir
- Welcoming 7 new signed members
- Strong cash reserves, despite struggles to recover from shutdown

In October, we asked the congregation to dream with us about GRU's future (see Rev Jessica's report for more details) and have used those responses to create plans for the coming year. This will create new benchmarks and ideals to strive for, including:

- Consciousness of our environmental impact and commitment to healing the earth and maintaining the interconnected web
- Increasing our presence in the community
- Commitment to social justice
- Continuing our commitment to radical inclusivity and community

There are many to thank for their assistance. Our amazing staff keeps us running and the board attempted to reflect this with recent salary increases.

The board members - Anne, Cathy, Carol, Susan, Tom, and Tim - who have put in lots of work and shared their many gifts. To everyone else who has chipped in, volunteered, and helped out and to our members and friends who have joined in to keep this community strong, loving, and supportive. I appreciate you all!

The board will continue to dream and build. We hope you will all join in to keep GRU vital and amazing.

*Submitted by Wendy Martin, Board President*

## **Financial Report**

The year 2023 has seen our building come alive again. Rental and building use is up. More people are attending services.

Financially, we are still in recovery from the COVID pandemic. Our donations remain lower than anticipated and inflation has had an impact on our expenses. Despite this, we were able to stick to the goal of investing in our staff and growing our programming. We also raised money for A Better Tent City and were able to release money from our Refugee Fund to assist in refugee educational needs.

In 2023 we received a federal grant for accessibility improvements and were able to use the money to install push activation switches on two exterior doors.

Thanks to our wonderful Dream Auction team, we raised just under \$11,000.

We anticipated a deficit for the year, but ended the year on a positive note with a surplus of \$3,988.

The main reasons for this surplus are:

- We received a private donation of approximately \$25,000 that helped to make up what would have been a significant shortfall in our donations.
- With the uptick in attendance, we received more anonymous cash donations than anticipated.
- Our salary expenses were lower due to timing issues that meant we only processed eleven payrolls in 2023.
- We spent less than half of the amount we budgeted for the Playcare Leader staff position, which went unfilled for two months.

Our cash reserves are still strong. At the end of 2023 we had a total of \$244,554 in cash reserves. Of this, \$160,000 are in higher interest GICS that we purchased in the first quarter of 2023.

Cash Reserves as of December 31, 2023	
Organization Account	\$53,660
Savings Account	\$30,720
Share Dividends	\$174
5 Year GIC	\$100,000
5 Year Step Up GIC	\$60,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$244,554</b>

Below is a summary of our financial results for 2023, subject to a financial review with our accounting firm BDO. A final review will be available at the AGM for anyone wishing to see it.

## 2023 Financial Summary

2023 Financial Summary	Budget 2023	Actuals 2023	Budget 2024
<b>INCOME</b>			
Identified Donations	\$ 200,000	\$ 201,816	\$ 200,000
Unidentified Donations	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,793	\$ 5,000
<b>Total Donations</b>	<b>\$ 201,000</b>	<b>\$ 204,610</b>	<b>\$ 205,000</b>
Balance of Accessibility Grant		\$ 1,078	
Dream Auction	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,927	\$ 9,000
Rental Revenue	\$ 300	\$ 4,891	\$ 3,600
Interest Income	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,549	\$ 1,500
<b>Total Other Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 14,300</b>	<b>\$ 18,444</b>	<b>\$ 14,100</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 215,300</b>	<b>\$ 223,054</b>	<b>\$ 219,100</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Staff	\$ 150,662	\$ 124,745	\$ 144,389
Leadership Training & Mbr Conf.	\$ 7,000	\$ 3,542	\$ 3,400
CUC/Unicamp Denominational Sup	\$ 11,157	\$ 11,154	\$ 9,144
Program Expenses	\$ 22,789	\$ 21,082	\$ 25,419
Property Management	\$ 39,871	\$ 43,261	\$ 45,025
Office and Administration	\$ 16,640	\$ 15,283	\$ 17,055
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 248,119</b>	<b>\$ 219,067</b>	<b>\$ 244,432</b>
<b>NET</b>	<b>\$ (32,819)</b>	<b>\$ 3,988</b>	<b>\$ (25,332)</b>

## 2023 Financial Review

2023 Financial Summary	Budget 2023	Actual 2023	Budget 2024
<b>INCOME</b>			
4050/55 - Identified Donations	\$ 200,000	\$ 176,710	\$ 200,000
Special Private Donation		\$ 25,106	
4100 - Unidentified Donations	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,793	\$ 5,000
Total Donations	\$ 201,000	\$ 204,610	\$ 205,000
4300 - Balance of Accessibly Grant		\$ 1,078	
4505 - Dream Auction	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,927	\$ 9,000
4600 - Rental Revenue	\$ 300	\$ 4,891	\$ 3,600
4902 - Interest Income	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,549	\$ 1,500
Total Other Revenue	\$ 14,300	\$ 18,444	\$ 14,100
Total Income	\$ 215,300	\$ 223,054	\$ 219,100
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
5000 - Minister's Salary			
5005 - Salary	\$ 64,940	\$ 59,673	\$ 68,403
5010 - Housing	\$ 18,000	\$ 16,500	\$ 18,000
5012 - Pension	\$ 8,315	\$ 7,618	\$ 8,840
5015 - Health Expense	\$ 2,740	\$ 2,797	\$ 3,025
5018 - Professional Expenses	\$ 4,500	\$ 3,578	\$ 5,000
5020 - Sabbatical Expenses	\$ 4,200	\$ 4,200	\$ -
Total Minister's Salary	\$ 102,696	\$ 94,365	\$ 103,268
5100 - DRE Salary			
5110 - Salary	\$ 14,309	\$ 6,024	\$ 12,015
5118 - Expenses			
5130 - Professional Development	\$ 500		\$ 20
Total DRE Salary	\$ 14,809	\$ 6,024	\$ 12,035
5200 - Music Director Salary			
5210 - Salary	\$ 10,400	\$ 8,072	\$ 7,784
5230 - Professional Development	\$ 20		\$ 20
Total Music Director Salary	\$ 10,420	\$ 8,072	\$ 7,804
5250 - Office Manager			
5252 - Salary	\$ 15,938	\$ 9,768	\$ 14,142
Total Office Administrator Salary	\$ 15,938	\$ 9,768	\$ 14,142
5373 - Combined CPP & EI	\$ 6,800	\$ 6,515	\$ 7,140

Total Staff	\$ 150,662	\$ 124,745	\$ 144,389
5300 · Leadership Training	\$ 3,000	\$ 250	\$ 3,000
5350 · Members Conference Expense	\$ 4,000	\$ 3,292	\$ 400
5400 · Denominational Support			
5410 · CUC	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 9,000
5420 · Unicamp	\$ 157	\$ 154	\$ 144
Total Denominational Support	\$ 11,157	\$ 11,154	\$ 9,144
5500 · Program Expenses			
5510 · Hospitality (for Sunday Services)	\$ 1,400	\$ 776	\$ 1,400
5515 · Programming	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,346	\$ 1,200
5520 · Board of Trustees	\$ 500	\$ 631	\$ 600
5527 · Care Network/Connecting Spirits	\$ 100	\$ 56	\$ 100
5530 · Chaplaincy	\$ 20		\$ 150
5535 · CRE	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,123	\$ 2,000
5536 · Childcare	\$ 6,500	\$ 5,159	\$ 6,500
5543 · Library Expense	\$ 200	\$ 481	\$ 250
5550 · Music	\$ 7,959	\$ 7,646	\$ 9,564
5555 · Communications	\$ 510	\$ 1,039	\$ 250
5560 · Worship Arts	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,116	\$ 2,500
5570 · Congregational Events	\$ 500	\$ 345	\$ 500
5575 · Social Action	\$ 300		\$ 20
5590 · Web Page	\$ 300	\$ 364	\$ 385
Total Program Expenses	\$ 22,789	\$ 21,082	\$ 25,419
5640 · Property Management -Sydney			
5630 · Renovations	\$ -		
5641 · Custodial	\$ 5,821	\$ 5,952	\$ 6,025
5642 · Heating and Water	\$ 3,600	\$ 3,599	\$ 3,705
5643 · Electricity	\$ 2,400	\$ 2,652	\$ 2,785
5644 · Insurance	\$ 7,300	\$ 7,461	\$ 8,015
5645 · Snow Removal	\$ 11,700	\$ 12,657	\$ 12,630
5646 · Maintenance & Repair	\$ 4,000	\$ 3,263	\$ 5,550
5647 · Lawn Care	\$ 2,280	\$ 2,692	\$ 2,830
5648 · Elevator Maintenance	\$ 2,770	\$ 4,425	\$ 2,985
5650 · Audio Visual		\$ 559	\$ 500
Total Property Management	\$ 39,871	\$ 43,261	\$ 45,025
5700 · Office and Administration			
5705 · Telephone and Internet	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,290	\$ 2,785
5710 · Bank Charges	\$ 500	\$ 609	\$ 630



5711 - Safety Deposit Box	\$ 40	\$ 40	\$ 40
5713 - PayPal Fees		\$ 28	
5715 - Photocopier and Supplies	\$ 3,600	\$ 3,223	\$ 3,600
5718 - Bookkeeping	\$ 6,000	\$ 5,368	\$ 6,000
5720 - Professional Fees Accounting	\$ 4,500	\$ 3,726	\$ 4,000
Total Office and Administration	\$ 16,640	\$ 15,283	\$ 17,055
Total Expenses	\$ 248,119	\$ 219,067	\$ 244,432
NET	\$ (32,819)	\$ 3,988	\$ (25,332)

## 2024 Budget Notes

In 2024 we will be entering the third year of a five- or six-year recovery period from the COVID pandemic. As financial stability improves, we see 2024 as a year in which we can grow our financial base and continue to invest in the staff and programs that are important to us.

However, it is still difficult to predict our donations. We saw an overall reduction in pledges for 2024 from our fall canvass. Financial pledges are an important way for congregants to help relieve this uncertainty.

We are anticipating a deficit of \$25,332. However, we are well positioned to manage such a deficit as our cash reserves are excellent.

## Income Notes

We have optimistically kept our donation budget at the 2023 level of \$200,000.

We have increased our budget for anonymous donations to \$5,000 because of increased attendance at services.

We have budgeted \$3,600 for rental income, due to the increase in rental demand in 2023.

## Expense Notes

There is a 5% salary increase for the minister and music director, effective March 1.

There is an 8% salary increase for the Office Administrator starting March 1 to bring the salary more in line with that of an office manager. However the overall budget is lower because it is based on a more accurate assessment of working hours (40 hours/month).

Our current Playcare Leader is on a limited contract from October 2023 to June 2024, negotiated separately from other staff, so that is why we have not budgeted a salary increase for this position.

We continue to try to find a balance between the needs of our congregation and the call to support our national organization, the Canadian Unitarian Council. We have therefore decided to allocate \$9,000 for the CUC in 2024 but have also budgeted \$3,000 to pay for CUC training programs or webinars that would be of interest to the people in our congregation.

Our building maintenance budget for 2024 has increased to allow for replacing the fountain in Whitton Hall.

We have budgeted for a substitute pianist from January to April 2024 while our Music Director is on sabbatical.

Due to the success of our music program, we have increased the music budget to support fifteen Pop Choir events and seven conductor-led performances by our Spirit of Life choir.

Some building costs are expected to increase because of inflation. We have added 5-7% to the cost for heating/water, electricity, and insurance.

## Report on Non-Budgeted Funds, Fiscal year 2023

3160 Minister's Discretionary Fund		
Opening Balance 2023	\$	100
Increases	\$	-
Disbursements	\$	(70)
Closing Balance 2023	\$	30

3170 OWL Fund		
Opening Balance 2023	\$	210
Increases	\$	-
Disbursements	\$	-
Closing Balance 2023	\$	210

3190 Youth Fund Raising		
Opening Balance 2023	\$	6,447
Increases	\$	4,192
Disbursements	\$	(1,127)
Closing Balance 2023	\$	9,512

3200 Refugee Support		
Opening Balance 2023	\$	9,108
Increases	\$	4,157
Disbursements	\$	(5,381)
Closing Balance 2023	\$	7,884

*Submitted by Carol Burrows*

## Staff Reports

### Office Manager

In 2023 we moved to a new normal in congregational life. My office duties are quite similar to what they were pre-pandemic, with more awareness of financial totals under Carol Burrows' excellent tutelage. Along with tracking donations and issuing tax receipts, I do a lot of information dissemination, answering emails and compiling *The Tab*, our email newsletter, each week.

**Building rentals** have increased again this year. Word of mouth has brought more inquiries about renting for events by groups and individuals not associated with GRU. We've had some excellent experiences renting to the Sanatan Bengali Cultural Association, Edge Imaging, and Elections Ontario. We had a less great

experience renting to an individual for a private party where fire alarms got pulled, ending up as a loss for GRU. Moving forward, we have a building information sheet for renters and will take care that all renters fully understand expectations.

*Submitted by Kristen Wilson, Office Manager*

## **Committee and Task Group Reports**

### **Affiliated Licensed Ceremony Officiant's Report**

This year there were several inquiries through our website, out of which two celebration of life ceremonies were completed in the fall of 2023. However, GRU was contacted through word of mouth, and I performed three weddings, one in August and two in October. One of these was my son Ben and his fiancée Aimee's wedding in Toronto.

Goals for 2024—working with the new lay chaplain to promote our rites of passage to the public. There is a need and we can provide services to so many people with different traditions and beliefs through rites of passage. I believe an update on the website would be a good way to reflect this.

Thank you again GRU, for the amazing opportunity and to be an appreciative representative of GRU for the last year.

*Submitted by Susan Patterson, Officiant*

### **Affiliated Wedding Minister's Report**

This past year has been a deeply difficult year for me on so many levels.

I had been signed up with an organization called WeddingWire which sent me several weddings, but cost me approximately \$90/month to be a member of it. I decided to drop that because while recovering from surgery last year, I was unable to take on many commitments. As a result I had 1 (one) wedding in 2023.

I am grateful to continue to serve as your Affiliate Wedding Minister. I plan to become stronger and would love to be available to those who would like my services.

*In gratitude, Rev. Evelyn Richter*

## **Audio/Visual Team**

Members: Ryan Bayne, Joanne Ryder, Mel Scholz, Tom Nagy

The A/V Team has been supporting live streaming of services, in-service audio and other technical activities at GRU since services restarted in 2021 after the pandemic shutdown. 2023 was a fairly quiet year, as our processes settled and we worked with the setup we'd finalized in 2022. Youtube continues to be our streaming provider of choice for services, but we also support non-service events (post-service gatherings, memorial services, congregational meetings, the Dream Auction). Scheduling has settled into a straightforward process.

We had one additional member for part of the year until they moved away. Recruiting helpers remains our greatest challenge; having another couple of folks on our team would be very helpful to us. Please consider volunteering to your level of comfort and availability! No technical or musical knowledge needed! We'll train you and Tom will bring Timbits!

This year, we will likely upgrade the phones we use, as they are wearing out—please consider donating a recent phone (iPhone 11 or newer preferred) to be used as a camera for streaming. We also hope to grow our team. Thanks to everyone who puts in time and attention to make our services accessible to all!

*Submitted by Tom Nagy*

## **Archives**

The Archives continues to collect and maintain the history of Grand River Unitarian Congregation. I made a slow start on digitizing some of the records.

*Submitted by Charlotte Innerd*

## **Building & Grounds**

Building and Grounds maintenance in 2023 was full of challenges and triumphs! Over the summer, an unhoused couple set up camp behind the shed in our yard. Some members and neighbours spoke to them and a friendly social worker approached them with an offer to connect to resources. Eventually they moved on, having left a huge trash pile, and Rev. Jess, Kemeny Babineau, and Art Phelan cleaned it up. We also battled vandalism on the back door and the side stoop, requiring frequent repainting and the installation of a dummy camera.

On the plus side were some lovely projects that happened in 2023. Pamela Rojas designed a beautiful mural in the Nursery, spending hours and hours on the effort and getting help from Maca Suazo, Aria O’Neil, and others. Art Phelan repaired the corners of some exterior steps. The dishwasher required some maintenance, but it was covered by the warranty from the work the previous year (that will make a Unitarian say Hallelujah!). And since Cathy Scott had secured a grant through the Enabling Accessibility Funds program offered by the federal Ministry of Employment and Social Development, she was able to have automatic door openers installed at both entrance doors to the building, making them accessible by pushing a button.

*Submitted by Kristen Wilson and Tim Pincura O’Neil, Board Liaison*

## **Canvass**

On Canvass Sunday, October 22, 2023, the GRU Board asked our friends and members to reflect—verbally and in writing—on what they were “daring to dream” for the future of our congregation. This is a summary of that feedback.

There were many affirmations of what people *already value* in our GRU community:

Sunday services are at their best when there are opportunities for lots of participation from many voices. This includes encouraging regular attendance so we are all part of the ongoing community connections and conversations.

We have amazing MUSIC at GRU, and we want MORE music. With some music. And then some *extra music* on top of that. On Sundays and other days. Formal and informal.

Many find us welcoming. Say HELLO and introduce yourself (again and again!)

Keep doing the important work already being done.

We dare to dream of deepening our bonds as a community:

Higher Sunday attendance creates better energy.

Encourage members who do not attend regularly to make a commitment to prioritize the GRU community and attend services, and children to attend Sunday fUUndays

More gatherings online & in person

Share more meals together (potluck lunches and suppers)

Share community talents and workshops

“Bring a Friend” Sunday.

Continue to support youth/child programming, including resuming OWL classes

Classes, forums, and practices to encourage us to deepen our faith, nurture and grow spiritual connection, and work together in the wider community.

Did we mention music? More music. And then a little bit more *music*.

We live in challenging times. Let’s center HOPE and LOVE.

We dare to dream of optimizing building use:

More art, more colour and sparkle in the building, its walls, and its fixtures.

The chancel is dark. Can we improve the lighting?

Dampen noise in Whitton Hall during coffeeshour

Encourage the use of the classrooms during coffeeshour and soupers for quieter gatherings of smaller groups so we can hear one another better.

Can we provide free space for community groups whose values we share?

Purchase nearby property and lease it (or reconfigure our space) as affordable housing.

Can the office be replaced with a zoo? (*does this mean we have to penguin-proof the computers and panda-proof the file cabinets?*)

We dare to dream *green*:

It’s time for another green audit to identify climate-conscious improvements at GRU

Affirm and increase practices of an eco-friendly building & maintenance.

Can we convert to green energy? Solar panels?

More bike racks, please!

Can we carpool?

We dare to dream of expanding our UU impact in the wider KW community:

More than one GRUster asked us to remind everyone of the many contributions GRU *already makes* to the KW community. To *not* hold this up causes unintended harm to the many volunteers who contribute countless hours to many

social justice efforts over many many years at GRU and beyond. It is always going to be true that 'we could do more', but it has never been true that we don't do anything. What are we willing and able to do?

*Are we willing and able* to offer our green space to a community group (Indigenous or otherwise) for their use?

*Are we willing and able* to offer the rent-free use of our building by community groups?

*Are we willing and able* to open registration for the Our Whole Lives values-based sexuality beyond our membership?

*Are we willing and able* to continue to engage in the work of decolonization, reconciliation, and anti-racism?

*Are we willing and able* to show up for protests, marches, vigils, Tri-Pride, and other acts of solidarity through our presence and witness for events in our region? Can we invite one another, encourage group GRU attendance, identify ourselves as part of the GRU community?

What are YOU willing and able to do?

We dare to dream "for the congregation to continue to be here for everybody who needs it."

The difference between what we do at GRU and what we don't *always* comes down to whether or not there's a member willing to champion the effort and encourage others to get involved. Our Board is always interested in receiving your proposals for initiatives. Our "Rule of 3" process was designed to encourage, empower, and equip any GRUster to offer pilot programs and projects of interest to our GRU community, within our walls and beyond our doors. You can read the guidelines and find the simple "3P" form here: <https://tinyurl.com/7vsxy2ew>. We look forward to hearing how we can help your daring dreams for this community come to life.

I look forward to seeing what the next decade holds for our GRU community.

Let's continue daring to dream.

*Submitted by Rev. Jess*



## **Religious Exploration (CRE)**

In the fall of 2022, Julia Zinn began offering our fUUnday school program for children in Kindergarten through Grade 6, which continued into the new year. This program was supported by 7 Junior Leaders—all senior youth from the congregation that worked on a rotating schedule.

This program centres UU fundamentals in Sunday morning programming, and seeks to provide opportunities for meaningful engagement with UU principles as well as community building amongst GRU children and youth. The program is designed to create space for peer role-modeling, leadership, and collaborative learning as well as activities that are structured such that all abilities and expertise are celebrated.

From January to June, the 4th-8th UU principles were explored through conversation, story, and collaborative activities. In May and June in particular, special guests helped to support learning about the 8th principle. Specifically, eKhaya, from local organization Bring On The Sunshine, shared his stories and drumming talents, and Pamela Rojas, local artist and GRU member, supported the children in creating a papier maché art installation.

During this time, our Nursery was open thanks to wonderful supervisors Ghazaal and Ahmad. Average attendance across children's programming from January to June was 9 children/week, with a peak of 17 children.

In June, Julia Zinn announced her departure from the role of DRE at GRU as she will be completing an internship in Winnipeg, MB as part of her master's program. Through the summer months, Julia worked to plan programming for the 2023-2024 year, including the development of a fUUnday School Handbook and training modules for incoming staff.

Two summer services were also hosted, with unstructured childcare made available thanks to our two nursery supervisors, and one of our junior leaders. Average attendance during the two summer Sundays was 6 children/week. Unstructured childcare continued until after Thanksgiving, when Isabelle Kirby took on the fUUnday Leader role.

Lessons for October and November followed the first two Unitarian Universalist principles. Activities and crafts were centered around Julia's handbook, with some creative twists at times to ensure programming was engaging to the demographic of children in attendance. The main focus from October to December has been to build an inviting and involved space using the children's art from activities and construct lesson plans that help to encourage consistent attendance. In December, the fUUnday group practiced for three weeks to learn some Christmas carols on boomwhackers and worked as a team to share that joy with the community at the Christmas Eve Morning service.

Average attendance varied per week in the fall. Usually, two Sundays a month have had between 4 and 6 consistent children every week attendees. The other two Sundays of the month, we have had between 9 and 12 kids, with one week in December seeing 15 children attend the fUUday group. As of now, there are 8 children registered for the new year, with some still in the process of being registered.

*Submitted by Julia Zinn and Isabelle Kirby*

## **Committee on Ministry**

The Committee on Ministry exists to facilitate shared understanding between congregation and ministry. As such, the COM serves as a sounding board for discernment, priorities, and focus and often functions as a liaison between our various teams, the board, the minister, and our membership at large. Like many other congregational teams, COM has largely been on hiatus for the past year, so members Denise Marigold, Louise Sims, Martin Edmonds, and Curtis Dueck are remaining in their roles to provide continuity and expertise.

*Submitted by Rev. Jessica P. Rodela on behalf of COM.*

## **Connecting Spirits (Pastoral Care Network)**

Connecting Spirits is a team of trained pastoral care providers led by the minister to offer personal connections, heart-centered conversations, and companionship through crisis. Throughout the year, Connecting Spirits volunteers June Anderson, Theresa Hanley, Cathy Payne, and Lynn Rubinstein offered appointments, cards, calls, and gatherings of different sorts and purposes. They can be contacted individually or by email at [ConnectingSpirits@GrandRiverUnitarian.ca](mailto:ConnectingSpirits@GrandRiverUnitarian.ca).

*Submitted by Rev. Jessica P. Rodela*

## **Drum Circle**

Members: Dianne Heise, Edward Bennett, Anne Dahmer, Doug Moen.  
The Drum Circle is currently on hiatus, due to Dianne and Ed being unavailable since they are dealing with family issues. But we also were plagued with low attendance during 2023.

Drum Circle dates during 2023: February 15, March 15, April 26, May 17 (nobody showed up), June 21 (announced, but cancelled due to low attendance: 1 RSVP), September 2 (announced, but cancelled due to Dianne and Ed not being available).

*Submitted by Doug Moen*

## **Greeters**

It has been another uplifting year of re-emergence as increasing numbers of people continue to ease back into more regular attendance and involvement in our Sunday services. Our team of volunteers continues to operate with a single greeter present each Sunday, working in tandem with a board member on key tasks. Our weekly schedule operates on monthly rotation. Our tasks are simple: Greet at the door, join a board member to collect the offering during the service, and assist a board member with counting the offering after service. We also ensure such items as hymnals, offering envelopes, pencils, and welcome cards are in stock and easily accessible throughout all pews.

*Submitted by Ellen Forrester*

## **Hearts and Hands (Pastoral Care Network)**

The Hearts and Hands network supports our friends and members during times of need by providing meals, transportation, conversation, visits and phone calls upon request.

As the interface person, I email members of our Hearts and Hands team with requests and also make postings in the GRU Facebook page. I sometimes use Google Docs Excel spreadsheets for people to sign up and provide assistance on dates of their choosing.

2023 was not a very busy year for our team and our numbers are dwindling. Information was shared about a few members having surgery or ongoing treatments who would appreciate meals or visits. Requests were made for cards to be sent for some milestone birthdays. Information was also shared about members who had deaths in their family or moved away.

People at Grand River are very compassionate and take care of each other, reaching out automatically in times of need. However, a notice placed in our TAB brought out one new member. Hopefully this trend will continue in 2024 as there are so many new faces in our congregation.

It is a pleasure to be part of a group that provides a positive image of caring and follows up with action. New members are always welcome to join the network. More hands make light work.

For future needs Nanci can be reached by phone or by email at [heartsandhands@grandriverunitarian.ca](mailto:heartsandhands@grandriverunitarian.ca).

*Submitted by Nanci Phelan, Coordinator*

## **Hospitality**

The Hospitality Crew (a.k.a. “POD”) is led by Rosemarie Harris, who monitors and maintains supplies of milk, coffee, cookies, etc., and Cathy Scott, who recruits and schedules volunteers. This division of labour is working well.

The serving of coffee, etc. after Sunday services resumed this fall. However, fewer volunteers for the Hospitality Crew has resulted in limiting Sunday coffee to the first and third Sundays of the month.

We continue to recruit for more members of the Hospitality Crew and plan to increase the number of Sundays when coffee is offered, as becomes possible.

The Hospitality Crew has provided refreshments for other events, such as the Coffee House and the Christmas Carol service.

*Submitted by Cathy Scott, coordinator*

## **Leadership Council**

The annual Leadership Council meeting took place on October 1, 2023. Traditionally, Leadership Council was composed of the chairs of the main committees and other key people, but as our committee system has evolved over the years, so has LC. This year we changed it up with a fun game of GRUpardy! The board provided all interested parties with information about building usage, congregational policies and procedures, how to get answers to FAQs, the budget process and financial matters, and how to connect to our congregation—all in a game show format with prizes and excitement.

*Submitted by Wendy Martin, President*

## **Library**

The Library continues to be well used! Remember to sign out your books (there’s a binder) and to return them. Books are meant to be read and used. We purchased some great books this year on a wide variety of themes and reflecting diverse thoughts. They are:

*Through the Lens of Whiteness: Challenging Racialized Imagery in Pop Culture* by Grimes, Diane S. from: Skinner House Books

*A Fire at the Center: Solidarity, Whiteness, and Becoming a Water Protector* by Van Fossan, Karen from: Skinner House Books

*The Tending Years: Understanding Your Child's Earliest Rituals* by Shattuck, J. L. from: Skinner House Books

*A Master Class on Being Human: A Black Christian and a Black Secular Humanist on Religion, Race, and Justice* by Pinn, Anthony from: Beacon Press

*A Space for Us: A Guide for Leading Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Affinity Groups* by Johnson, Michelle Cassandra from: Beacon Press

*Cherishing the Earth -- Nourishing the Spirit* by Curtis, Maria from: Lindsey Press

*The Rough Side of the Mountain: Black Women's Ministries in Unitarian Universalism* by Rahman, Qiyamah A. from: Skinner House Books

*When Time Is Short: Finding Our Way in the Anthropocene* by Beal, Timothy from: Beacon Press

*Why Are We Here?: Discerning our Unitarian Mission in an Upturned World* by Blackall, Jane from: Lindsey Press

Your Library Team is Charlotte Innerd (chair), Lyn MacLeod, Maca Suazo, Trish Lockie, Christa Van Daele, and Sophie Wilson. New members are always welcome.

*Submitted by Charlotte Innerd, Coordinator*

## **Music**

Members: Jay Moore, Boyd McDonald, Stephen Preece (music director), Colin Read, Tom Nagy, Greg Simmons, Margaret Insley (chair)

The role of the Music Committee is to support our thriving music programs by submitting the annual budget, approving music expenses during the year, ensuring the piano stays tuned and undertaking other initiatives as they arise.

Music programming and coordination for Sunday services is done by our music director, Stephen Preece, in consultation with Rev Jess. This includes inviting guest musicians and scheduling pianists for the one Sunday per month when Stephen is not scheduled to play. Choir director Rich Hyrtzak leads our Spirit of Life choir, which currently performs at seven Sunday services during the liturgical year. Rich also leads our Pop Choir, a drop-in choir that meets (approximately) every two weeks from September to sometime in the spring.

We extend a huge thank you to both Rich and Stephen for their fabulous energy, talent, and hard work in bringing music to GRU and for always finding music pieces which perfectly fit the sermon topic. A big thank you also goes to our occasional

pianists: Rosemarie Harris and Becky Verdun. Another big thanks to Colin Read and Tom Nagy who join with Stephen as our house band, the Sydney Street Trio, and to all the others who join in the music making. Thanks also to our song leaders for confidently singing our Sunday hymns and helping with those less familiar pieces.

In the fall of 2023, the Music Committee took the lead in organizing the Coffee House. This was our first in-person coffee house since the pandemic, and it was a joy to be back together again for this much-loved event. This year the Coffee House raised \$1080 for A Better Tent City. Thanks to everyone who performed, volunteered and/or attended the event.

*Submitted by Margaret Insley, Chair*

## **Nominating Committee**

Members: Art Phelan (chair), Charlotte Innerd, Judith Koeller

The Nominating Committee is a unique operational group at Grand River Unitarian Congregation. We're

- not quite a Standing Committee, which is delegated by the Board to take responsibility for some ongoing aspect of congregational life, and which has decision making, planning, and self-evaluating functions,
- not quite a Task Force, which is appointed by the Board to carry out a specific task and is dissolved once the one-time task is completed or the mandate has expired, and
- the only operational group where neither the Minister nor the President are members—even ex-officio.

Every year, a new Nominating Committee is struck (including at least one person, if possible, who served on the previous year's committee) and tasked with nominating a slate of candidates equal to the number of positions to be filled on the Board. This year, the committee was asked to find candidates for five positions.

To be eligible as a Trustee, our By-Laws require nominees:

- be at least eighteen years of age
- be a voting member of the congregation – both at election and throughout their term of office
- not serve more than six years within eight consecutive years

Our current Board Trustees are serving two-year terms. At the February 2020 AGM, our By-Laws were amended to change the length of terms that started on (and after) that date from three-year terms to two-year terms. Our current Trustees are:

Wendy Martin, President, ending a two-year term (elected in 2022), preceded by a three-year term (elected in 2019)

Cathy Scott, Vice President, ending a two-year term. Cathy was appointed in 2023 to fill the vacancy of Brenda Moen who resigned for personal reasons. (Brenda was elected in 2022)

Carol Burrows, ending a two-year term (elected in 2022), preceded by a three-year term (elected in 2019)

Anne Dahmer, ending a two-year term (elected in 2022), preceded by a two-year term (elected in 2020)

Tom Nagy, ending a two year term (elected in 2012), preceded by a three-year term (elected in 2019), preceded by a one-year term (appointed in 2018)

Tim O'Neil, in the middle of a two-year term (elected in 2023)

Susan Patterson, in the middle of a two-year term (elected in 2023)

As noted above, Wendy, Cathy, Carol, Anne, and Tom are completing terms.

Having served five consecutive years on the Board—the last two as our President—Wendy isn't eligible for re-election to a full two-year term, as she would exceed six consecutive years during her new term. However, due to the unusual circumstance of having five (5) vacancies on the Board, Wendy has agreed to serve for another year.

The recovery from the Covid pandemic subjected GRU to challenges that persisted long after 2020, as well as introducing unexpected new obstacles. We greatly appreciate the ongoing hard work of our Board members. We'd like to express thanks to Cathy, Tom, Carol and Anne for their service during very trying times.

The Nominating Committee has five motions to make at the Annual General Meeting.

Motion: We nominate Wendy Martin for a one-year term.

Motion: We nominate Becky Verdun for a two-year term

Motion: We nominate Neil Hunt for a two-year term

Motion: We nominate Margaret Insley for a two-year term

Motion: We nominate Jamie Wilson for a two-year term

Thanks to Becky Verdun, Jamie Wilson, Margaret Insley, Neil Hunt and Wendy Martin for accepting our nomination. Each nominee has supported our congregation in many ways. The Nominating Committee is confident they will make excellent contributions to the Board in the coming year.

We asked each nominee to answer a few questions for us.

### **Wendy Martin**

- 1) How long have you been part of GRU? What areas of your participation at GRU have been the most meaningful to you?

I have been attending GRU since 2010. I have participated at GRU in many ways, all of which were meaningful but the most important aspect to me are the people and the relationships with them. I especially like working with CRE and getting to know the kids. I think that I learn as much from their curiosity and enthusiasm as I teach them.

- 2) What excites you about volunteering for the GRU Board?

I am excited to continue volunteering with the board because it is such a difficult time and climate with Covid. It is even more important that GRU be a presence in the lives of its members during times of trial. I am proud to be a part of keeping our community strong and functional in an ever-changing capacity.

- 3) What unique perspectives and/or life experience do you bring to our leadership?



My varied perspectives and experience include mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, youth leader, crafter, thespian, dancer, singer, chronic pain warrior, healing minister, visual merchandiser, office administrator, aquatics instructor, baker, homemaker, volunteer, and teacher.

- 4) If GRU had unlimited resources (money and people power), what would be the first project you would focus on?

I would love to have a community dinner program.

### **Neil Hunt**

- 1) How long have you been part of GRU? What areas of your participation at GRU have been the most meaningful to you?

I have been a member of GRU since 2012, and have been involved in courses and discussions, been the church treasurer for 4 years, and sometimes been part of the choir. I particularly enjoy the social aspects of the congregation as well as investigating my beliefs.

- 2) What excites you about volunteering for the GRU Board?

I would like to be part of the GRU board because I want to give of some of my talents, and it also allows me to engage more in the life of the congregation.

- 3) What unique perspectives and/or life experience do you bring to our leadership?

I have led a team of people at work for most of my career, and I enjoy building consensus. I have been involved in my previous Anglican church and have undergone a spiritual journey since then. I hope that my journey helps me empathize with people with different faith ideas.

- 4) If GRU had unlimited resources (money and people power), what would be the first project you would focus on?

If GRU had unlimited resources, the first thing I would focus on is programs and social engagement for young people and adults. With a more invested and connected community, we could then look toward more growth and community and social-issue engagement.

### **Becky Verdun**

- 1) How long have you been part of GRU? What areas of your participation at GRU have been the most meaningful to you?

I first started attending GRU in the Fall of 2012. I was a pretty casual attendee at first, as I was a student with multiple jobs and lots of other things going on, and I was trying to figure out what I was doing with my life and where I would end up. I was probably more regular at pub nights than I was at Sunday services! I gradually started attending more regularly and getting involved in things, and became a member somewhere along the way. Over the years I have volunteered with Sunday morning children's programming, I sing in the choir, song-lead, play piano, read children's stories, and have been a member (and chair) of the Social Action Committee. I really enjoy the opportunities for collaborative music-making and working with this community on social action projects (such as our recent collections of needed items and money for A Better Tent City).

- 2) What excites you about volunteering for the GRU Board?

I am excited to learn more about the inner workings of GRU, and contribute to the ongoing work of this community in a practical way! I also look forward to getting to know the other board members more, and to have the opportunity to play a role in visioning for the future.

- 3) What unique perspectives and/or life experience do you bring to our leadership?

In my professional life, I am a Social Worker and have worked in the

field of accessibility and disability for many years, so I aim to bring a social justice and anti-oppressive lens to all the work that I do. I also have been part of several different religious communities since I was a child and have volunteered in a range of capacities over the years, so I feel I have a fairly good understanding of the various ways that differently-sized religious communities can function, and am interested in sharing this experience with GRU.

- 4) If GRU had unlimited resources (money and people power), what would be the first project you would focus on?

If GRU had unlimited resources, I would love to find creative and new ways to collaborate with and support other community organizations that are already doing great work. Maybe we could work with the symphony and universities to host rehearsal space, mentorship, and commission new works of music, theatre, and art from the local arts community! Maybe we could work with the Working Centre and A Better Tent City to provide housing and wraparound support to our unhoused neighbours! Maybe we could work with Community Justice Initiatives and Extend-A-Family to address loneliness and belonging amongst youth, families, people with disabilities, and seniors! These are just the first ideas that popped into my head; I think the sky's the limit here because we have so many great local organizations (and significant community challenges), and I have a hard time picking just one.

## **Margaret Insley**

- 1) How long have you been part of GRU? What areas of your participation at GRU have been the most meaningful to you?

I have been part of GRU since 1993. I have served on the Board in the past, including the years of 2007 through 2012. This was a challenging and rewarding experience. During this time we moved from our previous location on Dunbar Road in Waterloo to our current building, we undertook the renovation to install an elevator, and we welcomed Rev Jess as our minister—all pretty awesome! Also very fulfilling has been my participation in our children's programs in the 1990s and 2000s. My two sons were regular attenders. I have always been a participant in our music programs as a regular choir member,

coffee house performer, and enjoyer of all the music in our congregation.

2) What excites you about volunteering for the GRU Board?

There are interesting times for liberal religious organizations, as many churches struggle to maintain attendance and remain relevant. I am excited to be part of the conversation at GRU as we renew and reinvent ourselves in the post-pandemic world. What is our place and our role in the community? How do we best serve our members and friends?

3) What unique perspectives and/or life experience do you bring to our leadership?

I bring my perspective as a long time member of GRU. I bring my experience gleaned from growing up in Calgary and working in my first permanent job as an economist at a natural gas pipeline company in Calgary. I bring my experience as a mother. As a recently retired professor, I bring experience doing research, teaching, and administration. More recently I have joined the board of the condo building where I reside. I am unexpectedly having to learn about HVAC systems, roof leaks, and other joys of building management.

4) If GRU had unlimited resources (money and people power), what would be the first project you would focus on?

I can't pick just one. Here are several that come to mind for me.

Renovate our kitchen so that it meets the standard for meal preparation. This would allow our building to be used for more activities throughout the week.

Hire a building custodian who could look after building repairs and maintenance as well as be present in the building during rental activities. This would give us more flexibility for rentals.

Hire our music staff for more hours so that we could have more choir sessions and other types of musical experiences.

Hire children's religious education staff for more hours so that we can enrich our children's programs

**Jamie Wilson**

- 1) How long have you been part of GRU? What areas of your participation at GRU have been the most meaningful to you?

I've been a member at GRU for about 10 years. I've enjoyed participating in Souper Sunday's, people seem to appreciate my soups. It's been nice working as an usher, it's a good way to put names to faces and have a short chat with chatty types.

- 2) What excites you about volunteering for the GRU Board?

Don't know if I'm excited, but I feel as a member of GRU everyone has a duty to do their fair share.

- 3) What unique perspectives and/or life experience do you bring to our leadership?

I've had several career changes over my work life, including working in the admin side of several of the largest law firms in Toronto. I also served several terms on the board at my kid's daycare centre in Toronto when they were younger.

- 4) If GRU had unlimited resources (money and people power), what would be the first project you would focus on?

I like the idea of having a drop down screen and projector in the sanctuary, it seems kind of awkward when we need to have an onscreen presentation up there. Also a dedicated soup cabinet everyone could put their soup crocks into with individual plug-ins so people don't have to search around for somewhere to plug in the crock pots.

## **Social Action**

The Social Action Committee's primary efforts this year were supporting our neighbours at "A Better Tent City" (ABTC). In February we collected and delivered donations of toiletries and towels, which were greatly needed and appreciated by the residents at ABTC. At the October coffee house, we invited Nadine Green (site coordinator) and Laura Hamilton (board member) to tell us about their work at ABTC in supporting some of our most vulnerable unhoused neighbours, and we raised over \$1000 to support their ongoing needs.

Outside of this, we continued to have conversations about our purpose and vision as a committee. Our numbers were dwindling, and many of our committee members are significantly involved in social action work outside of the committee, which takes substantial time and energy. We know that Grand River Unitarian Congregation members and friends believe that social action is important, and we also know that committee membership isn't always inspiring or the best way to do this work. We took a six-month hiatus to focus on the other efforts that we were involved in and consider next steps for the committee. At this time, we have decided that it is time for the Social Action Committee in its current form to end. This certainly isn't the end of social action endeavours at GRU, and I know that other forms of action will emerge in time to fill this space.

Thank you to you all for your support of the many Social Action Committee efforts over the years.

*Submitted by Becky Verdun (chair), on behalf of the rest of the committee (June Anderson, Kathie Keefe, Corliss Olson, Jim Sannes)*

## **The TBDs (JUNIOR YOUTH GROUP)**

There were 9 youth in grades 6/7/8 registered at the start of 2023. Though attendance waned in the spring, we ended the year with a good turnout for our first-ever joint meeting with the Whatevers Senior Youth, and we celebrated one TBD's bridging into the older group. This fall four returning members welcomed four newcomers. We currently meet once per month, focusing on community-building games, and are looking for options to expand our meeting options in the coming year. Newcomers are welcome to join us, but registration is required. Contact us at [JrYouth@GrandRiverUnitarian.ca](mailto:JrYouth@GrandRiverUnitarian.ca) to get connected.

*Submitted by Rev. Jess on behalf of the Jr Youth Advisory Team: Rev. Jess, Jessica Bayne, Lisa Lindsay, & Martin Edmonds*

## **UU Whatevers Youth Group**

“What happens in Youth Group stays in Youth Group”...but we’ll make an exception for the Annual Report!

The Whatevers are a group of seven youth aged 14-18 who usually meet twice a month throughout the school year, after service on Sundays. This fall we welcomed six returning youth and a new member who bridged in from the Junior Youth in June.

This fall we have enjoyed hanging out in the lounge together exploring big ideas, reflecting on our UU principles and figuring out what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist young person...with snacks!

We also had some fun in the moonlit corn maze at the pumpkin patch and a chill and chilly visit to the Donkey Sanctuary. We look forward to a few more adventures together this spring.

We were thrilled to bring back our Souper Sundays and see our GRU community gather together again to share a meal. Soupers are a busy time for the Whatevers, but this crew were up to the challenge and can’t wait to host a few more!

Last May our youth headed off to their first in-person CanUUdle youth gathering in a number of years, in Ottawa, and they are really excited to head to Edmonton this May for their next opportunity to bond with the UU Youth community across Canada!

*Respectfully submitted by Anne Dahmer, Colin Read, Aden Seaman, and Erin Stjarne, youth leaders*

## **Website Team**

The Website Team continues to exist but has been taking a lesser role in recent years as the regular Website updates have been done by the office manager. The team occasionally helped with some of the larger updates and consulting. Also, the team has done renewals of the website & domain accounts, and maintained the congregation email addresses (ending in @grandriverunitarian.ca).

*Submitted by Martin Edmonds*

## **Worship Arts**

Our Worship Artists help the minister and guest speakers plan and present Sunday services. We meet a few times per year to debrief highlights, identify challenges, and brainstorm topics and plans. Sunday attendance has been unpredictable, but is on the rise. Among our best attended services in 2023 were the Question Box Sermon and the Christmas Eve Candlelight service, in addition to any Sunday featuring our Spirit of Life Choir. Our livestream option provides accessibility for many, with an average of eight tuning in on Sunday mornings, and many more post-dated viewings. We owe much gratitude to our diligent Tech team members: Joanne, Mel, Ryan, and Tom, for making our livestream possible.

In the fall we welcomed new members Charlotte Innerd and Jessica Bayne to the team which includes Brenda Moen, Doug Moen, Rosemarie Harris, Janis Collins. Kathie Keefe retired from this role late in the year after many years of valued service. Newcomers are welcome to join us—contact Rev. Jess to receive an invitation to our next meeting to see if this team is a good fit for your interests and talents.

*Submitted by Rev. Jessica P. Rodela, Coordinator*

## **Affiliate Group Reports**

### **Refugee Concerns Group**

The Ahmadi family has continued the process of settlement in the course of 2023. The core work of the refugee concerns group is the sustained human work of friendship, personal support, practical contacts, dialogues, and community referrals as needed to a network of resources. As well, planned group festivities such as Christmas and Thanksgiving events express the growing friendship between the family and our group members, and often involve our partners in Rochester, who are the Unitarians who initially identified the family and offered financial support.

In recent weeks, the Rochester partners contributed a special educational donation so that one family member could pursue Advanced English studies. Members of GRU have also contributed to an educational fund which still holds a modest reserve in 2024 that members of the family can tap into. This fund has been critical in the past year for building confidence and peace of mind for the younger Ahmadis as they move forward. A few GRU members not in the Refugee Concerns Group have also supported or befriended the family in helpful ways.

In 2023, the Ahmadi family shifted entirely to their own financially independent status. This big step has been made much harder by growing costs in housing. They continue to reside in the first rental house that they first arrived to. A number of



planning steps had been taken in the previous year, so the last 12 months saw a culmination of previous steps, especially in educational contexts. Both Ghazaal and Ozair sought entry to the University of Waterloo and were successful in that goal, hitting the benchmarks they needed for English language. Ghazaal is currently involved in Advanced English studies at Renison College in order to further prepare for demanding graduate studies. In addition, entry into the labour market has been important for the family. Two of the younger Ahmadis achieved part-time jobs, while the third focuses on studies in high school. Both Ahmadi parents continue to take English studies from home.

Finally, a few group members have continued to provide sustained support in 2023 to a racialized family in the community, helping with specific hands-on support for career and personal supports, steering housing dilemmas in today's rental market, and providing day-to-day tutoring for a youth of that family. This work has been going on for a number of years.

Members of the group in 2023 are Carol Burrows, who is transitioning away from the congregation, Nicole Langlois, Louise Sims, Ellen Papenberg, Jim Sannes, and Christa Van Daele. We continue to meet about four times a year.

*Submitted by Christa Van Daele, Coordinator*

## **Affinity Group Reports**

### **GRU Dance Squad**

In the spring, three GRU members applied to the board for permission to host low-key dance parties in Whitton Hall with no budget. The board accepted and the “Dance Squad” started by organizing well-attended Saturday night decade-themed dances in April and June. The September dance was sparser and attendees discussed themes or features that might draw more people. If there's something you'd like to see, let the squad—Jessica Bayne, Mel Scholz, and Kristen Wilson—know!

*Submitted by Kristen Wilson*

### **UU Stitch Circle**

Stitch Circle meets the third Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon for creativity and companionship. Most of our members stitch, knit, or crochet, but all crafts are welcome and anyone can drop in for a visit. We welcomed several new members this year. We took two field trips. In July we travelled to Hamilton to visit the Radical Stitch Exhibit at the Hamilton Art Gallery. This was part of our 8th Principle programming as we learned how crafts have affected cultures and how

beading was outlawed as a way of destroying Indigenous customs. This trip sparked interest in working with local Indigenous artists to learn more. We hope to continue this work in the coming year. We also took a fun trip to Paris in August to visit the Mary Maxim tent sale and stock up on supplies. We shared lunch together on both trips.

*Submitted by Wendy Martin, coordinator*

## **Women's Book Group**

Throughout 2023 the Book Group met monthly, usually on the fourth Monday, from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. For the first six months we met via Zoom using the link created for us by GRU Office Manager, Kristen Wilson. From September to December, thanks to the technical wizardry of Melissa Rockenfield, we experimented with a hybrid format whereby some of us gathered in person at Sydney Street and others joined the discussion via Zoom from home. We are a fairly small group, usually eight to ten members, so this worked quite well. For the winter, however, we will return to Zoom-only meetings.

Each September we choose books for the coming year from titles suggested by members. They include fiction and non-fiction, current and older titles, Canadian and international authors. Our discussions are lively and thought-provoking.

Visitors and new members are welcome. Notice of meeting date, book title, and contact information are provided in the GRU weekly online Tab. If you are interested, but not comfortable with the Zoom technology, please let us know and we will try to arrange for some coaching.

*Submitted by Pat Mighton*