

2024

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

JANUARY 2025





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Roles

Rev. Dr. Michelle Bogue-Trost, Senior Minister

2024 Annual Narrative Report of the Senior Minister

1. State of the Church

Asbury First has welcomed me with kindness and openness to the gifts I bring for ministry with this congregation. It has been a wonderful five months, and I am grateful for the space and initiatives that Ted created in his interim period here.

We are in the final phases of stewardship and budgeting for 2025. Together with the Giving Team, we have moved our stewardship focus from a goal of budget funding only to a goal of giving as a spiritual matter. There is rich ground for developing this in coming years. The approach is promising: As of November 26, we have received financial commitments for 2025 in the amount of \$1,475,000. However, to create growth, we need to engage in some thoughtful and prayerful work around matching funding priorities and ministry goals.

Our new Volunteer Engagement Team is well-prepared to enter the next planning phase for creating our year-round volunteer recruitment program. This initiative is crucial for increasing active participation and ensuring our various ministries have the support they need.

We have just approved the creation of a Governance-level Social Concerns Committee that will bring together the hopes and vision of several justice-oriented groups within the congregation which have not had a "home" for their work. I look forward to developing a strategy and focus with the members of this new group, and leading Asbury First in its new system-wide justice efforts.

We have formalized a Worship and Arts super-team that brings together leaders of the altar guild, the arts group, music and worship staff, and a new two-person team of worship logistics coordinators. It is my hope that together we can maintain the excellence of worship at Asbury First, as well as streamline the processes of all the wonderful personnel who create and produce worship each week. I believe that this team can evolve to be primarily a creative team that can plan seasons' worth of creative, meaningful, engaging, and powerful worship experiences.

I have encouraged the Ministerial staff to lead budget and programmatic work within their respective areas, living into their charge as leaders of those areas. Together, we have begun to create a vision of collaborative ministry that plans arcs of meaning and focus through the year that can be implemented and experienced across all ministry areas.

Additionally, I have provided a 3-hour supervisor's training session to our executive staff. In the coming months, I plan to extend this training to the next cohort, which includes supervisors of both paid and volunteer staff. This ongoing training is essential for equipping our leaders with the skills to guide, support, and inspire others.



2. Ministering Within the Congregation and Beyond

I continue the work of meeting and connecting with members, which has been wonderful! These interactions have allowed me to understand their concerns, joys, and needs, which in turn informs my thoughts on ministry, mission, and vision.

3. Administering Temporal Affairs

Asbury First has celebrated 17 Baptisms and 22 new members (so far) this year, with more to join in December.

Beginning collaborative work in our Ministry Team has been an exciting aspect of my developing ministry here, and I look forward to creating engaging and fruitful ministry across ministry areas with them.

I am beginning the work of focusing on a vision for administrative systems that support the mission and ministry of our church. I have started getting glimmers of vision for our church's future that is aligned with our collective goals and values. Enacting this vision depends on the valuable insights and recommendations of our Dream Team, expected to conclude its work in December and present its strategic recommendations in January. Once their report is complete, we can begin to refine and implement this vision, ensuring that it reflects both our current needs and future hopes.

4. Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth

I attended The Gathering in October in Montgomery, AL, and took a few extra days off to visit my sister. I have begun meeting with a group of UM clergywomen in the Rochester area, and have established ecumenical and interfaith relationships through several growing friendships and groups. Looking ahead to 2025, I plan to earn an executive certificate in religious fundraising. This certification will be invaluable for our ongoing and future stewardship efforts. I also intend to bring members of the staff who wish to participate along for the coursework and project, so we can design an ongoing stewardship plan with a shared understanding and collaborative approach.

I am excited about ministry together with the people of Asbury First, and am delighted to serve God as your Senior Minister in this chapter of Asbury First's story.

Rev. Kathy Thiel, Minister for Congregational Care

The year of 2024 was full and busy. It was a time of grieving the loss of Stephen as Senior Minister, adjusting to Ted as our Interim Senior Minister and Michelle as our new Senior Minister. There continued to be many more opportunities to adjust to the wave of post-pandemic life for us as a community and for each parishioner. It is wonderful to have returned to in person home visits,



hospital visits, and hospice visits. Our first and foremost prayer continues to be for the health and well-being of all people, and for the end of suffering.

The well-being of all people in body, mind, heart and soul continues to be the focus of the work that I do here at Asbury First. It has been a great joy to be able to visit you in person, to see you here in the sanctuary, the office, and even out for a meal in a restaurant. What a joy to share physical space, and also to now have the options of live streaming and Zoom so that we can continue to be present to each other when we cannot be together in person.

I continue to lead small groups in prayer, in fellowship, and in study. The people in these groups are dedicated to the church, to God, and to each other. Relationships continue to deepen and strengthen. When we are unable to meet in person, cards, phone calls, emails and texts are still good ways to stay in touch, remind each other we are not alone, and continue to spread the love of God throughout our community and the world.

I was reminded in a new members class of one of my favorite parts of this community, and I offer this as an invitation to anyone who is reading this report: if you have an idea for something we are not doing and you think we should be doing, then please call or text or email so we can talk about how to get your idea off of the drawing board and onto our church schedule!

As always, we pray that you are well in body, mind, heart and soul.

*Love,
Kathy*

Mike Mullin, Minister for Youth and Discipleship

In January of 2024, I was once again honored by Asbury First United Methodist Church to be recommended to re-enter the process of ordination in The United Methodist Church. Unfortunately, the Genesee Valley District Committee on Ordained Ministry responded with this letter:

We received your request for reinstatement as a certified candidate and a licensed local pastor. After nearly ten years with many conversations trying to reconcile your theology within the broad parameters of The United Methodist Church, it is clear there are irreconcilable differences too vast to resolve. As stated in your letter from the Genesee Valley dCOM regarding discontinuance, it is the discernment of the Genesee Valley dCOM that your theology is outside the broad parameters of The United Methodist Church, specifically your Christology and understanding of the resurrection.

Article III - Of the Resurrection of Christ states, "Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day." In your meeting with dCOM on May 16, 2023, you stated how you do not affirm Jesus' bodily resurrection occurred, nor do you affirm the place of the resurrection as necessary to salvation. In your sermon on November 26, 2023, you said, "I personally do not believe in a hell of eternal punishment or a heaven of eternal life." As was sent to you last year, one who seeks ordination in The United Methodist Church is to be "... accountable to The United Methodist Church, accept its Doctrinal Standards



and Discipline and authority..." ¶ 304(j). Therefore, the Genesee Valley dCOM will not meet with you and continues to conclude you are not a good fit for candidacy in The United Methodist Church.

I find this particularly problematic since United Methodists do not purport an exclusive and definitive belief in bodily resurrection (and neither does the Bible); nor do United Methodists express a mandated belief in any type of after-life theology. For further interest, the fuller context of the quote they pulled from my sermon is this:

There are scholars and theologians that believe in an afterlife and a literal heaven and hell, and there are those who don't. One of the reasons I am compelled to remain United Methodist is that I believe we can hold space for everyone on this spectrum. If nothing else is remembered from this sermon today—and it probably won't be—just remember this: the kingdom of God is made up of people with vastly different beliefs who are all trying their best to do good together. And maybe that's enough.

While I, personally, do not believe in a hell of eternal punishment or a heaven of eternal life, I still love and respect those that do—and recognize the rich tradition that helps form and found that belief.

And by holding this space and tension, we often discover that we can find common ground. Because, while I may be skeptical of an afterlife, I firmly believe that heaven and hell are very real. Each and every day, we are bombarded by news stories of people who are living in hell. And each and every day, social media reminds us that heaven is just a few degrees of separation away from our grasp.

I shared this context and my questions of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry blockading my pursuit of ordination based on hyperbolic interpretations of our doctrines with all of the leaders in our conference and I received no notable responses. I was further disheartened when the decision was made by our Asbury First leadership to not include me in the December charge conference for recommendation to re-enter the ordination process. While I can appreciate the position that after 4 years of dismissal, it may be time to take a break, I cannot appreciate a decision that is made without my voice or consent.

In the past, I have taken this moment to share that the diminishment of my conference connections are made up for by my Asbury First realities. But, if I am being honest, I am struggling with that at this time. For years, I have expressed the need for additional staff help in the area of discipleship—particularly in the area of youth ministry—and for some type of sabbatical or leave. Instead, I have continued to have more jobs and responsibilities added to my plate, with no additional compensation or help offered. While our annual report this last year listed my compensation package at almost \$110,000, the reality is that my salary is about \$65,000. I was hired as a full-time youth director in 2013 at a salary of \$44,000. By 2018, I was a licensed local pastor and had a salary and housing allowance that amounted to \$55,000. Based on inflation rates, those salaries are equivalent to \$60,000 and \$69,000 respectively in 2025. This means that I am currently making a little more [comparatively] than I was in 2013 when my only job was youth ministry; and I am making notably less than I was in 2018 when my job was still significantly less than it is today. While I feel and hear the affirmations of support from the Asbury First community, it is hard to reconcile those words with these fiscal realities and personal job responsibilities. I do still see great potentiality for the youth and discipleship ministries at Asbury First, but I am less sure that I will be able to help bring these potentials to fruition. My work and time is spread so thin that maintaining the status quo is starting to become questionable. I would like to see a future where Asbury First invests in these ministries, and I think one place to start is with reports like this that showcase the realities of what we are really working with. We have difficult decisions that need to be made regarding our time, talents, and treasures; and what we choose to invest in now will shape the future of our congregation and community. And as long as we are intentional, I believe any decisions that we make can be good ones.



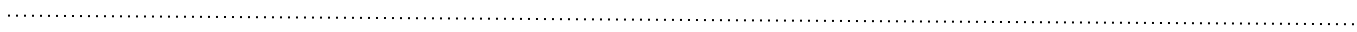
Beyond these ordination and compensation challenges, the youth and discipleship ministries at Asbury First have continued to have multiple highlights. We continued to host 2 Disciple Bible Studies that began in 2021; one that worked through Disciple III, and one that worked through Disciple IV. Three of the Discipleship Project Groups continued to meet after the summer break. A new Banned Book Club was formed and has welcomed guests from beyond our congregation to their bi-monthly meetings. The Adult Sunday school classes have continued to grow; one class studying the parables of the Bible, and the other offering various guest speakers. Wednesday evening programming has continued with new topics highlighted each month. Women’s groups, Men’s groups, covenant groups, and various other affinity groups have also continued to meet regularly both on and off campus. If you are interested in getting engaged in any type of Bible study or small group, please reach out at any time. We would love to have everyone at Asbury First feel like there is a meaningful way to engage beyond our Sunday morning worship—this can be through discipleship, outreach, music, etc. We recognize that the church is a community, and finding meaningful ways to foster that community throughout the week is important.

For details regarding our Youth Ministries from 2024, I encourage you to check out the Youth Ministry Annual Report. As a highlight in this space, please know that our youth programs continue in large part thanks to the commitments of our families. Through youth group, youth choirs, youth theater, youth mission trips, etc. our youth and families have found something worth committing to at Asbury First. This commitment has helped to create a sense of family among the youth. These connections take time and effort to foster, and we look forward to continuing to nurture this in the years ahead.

As I look forward to 2025, I recognize that I have called out some significant challenges at both local, district, and conference levels that need to be addressed. And while we can never be sure of what the future will bring, I am hopeful that our community will continue to grow and thrive regardless of what comes next. We have made it through more significant challenges like a pandemic and shifts in senior leadership, and I believe that Asbury First is committed to its call to love, live, serve, and repeat. With this in mind, as you consider your own dreams for 2025 (and beyond), I would love to hear how these dreams fit in with our vision for youth and discipleship at Asbury First. Specifically, if you have dreams about new programs and initiatives for Asbury First, please reach out. I would love to connect with you to see how our dreams and visions might align. We truly are better together, and I am thankful for your continued support throughout this past year.

May there be Peace,

-Mike Mullin





Rev. Pat Dupont, Minister for Outreach & Director of the Community Outreach Center

Pastoral Reflection:

2024 was Year 2 for the Community Outreach Center, but the programs that make up the Center, along with our off-campus ministries, have provided the community with over 100 years of service collectively throughout their histories. This long commitment to service is a testament to our congregation's deep compassion for our suffering neighbors. In 2024 the C.O.C. provided:

Over 12,000 hot meals
Over 400 loads of laundry
Over 1,000 showers
Almost 300 haircuts
Over 200 repaired bicycles
Almost 50 refurbished bicycles
Over 2400 families with clothing and/or household goods totaling almost 6,000 individuals
Almost 1,000 bags of groceries
Over 300 patients with healthcare

Unfortunately, the long history and huge impact of our programs is also a testament to the great need in our city and world. Even after all of this toil, we know that tomorrow people will still need to be clothed, fed and cared for. And the day after tomorrow...and the day after that...

Ecclesiastes 1:2-6 comes to mind:

What is there to show

for all of our hard work
here on this earth?

People come, and people go,
but still the world
never changes.

The sun comes up,
the sun goes down;

it hurries right back
to where it started from.

The wind blows south,
the wind blows north;
round and round it blows
over and over again.

Are our efforts fruitless when they hardly seem to make a dent in the great need that surrounds us?

I would argue they are not, primarily for two reasons:

Simple acts like serving a meal, offering warm clothing, or providing a caring and empathetic listening ear have an intrinsic sacred value that is not diminished by repetition. There has always been and will always be holy meaning in meeting one another's most basic human needs.



The work of justice and the work of compassion are intimately woven together. The work of moving our world in a long-term systemic way towards equity cannot be divorced from daily practices of humility, community, compassion, and care for one another.

As we enter 2025, our country is changing. Many marginalized people are afraid of what the future might bring for them. Let us stay grounded in the work we have always done: caring for those who suffer in a personal way. Let us continue to open our hearts and doors to those whom the powers and principalities are content to abandon or abuse. When we feel compelled to shake our fists at national and global systems, let us remember to also open our hands to our neighbors. Let us embody the alternative to Empire in which we wish to live. Let us invest in and remember the sacred value of small, daily compassionate practices. Let us seek out the small, persistent, invasive mustard seed that is God's Kingdom among us. Let us stay grounded in the steadfastness, faithfulness and holy persistence of God.

In Christ,
Rev. Pat Dupont

Lay Reflection:

2024 started with two things: A brand-new Outreach Committee and a major cut in the budget. Much of the year was spent grappling with finances – coming to understand them, learning the exact sources of our income, and tracking our expenditures better. The Outreach Committee drew up rules for sharing funding with off-campus organizations, ensuring that this undesignated outreach fund wouldn't, for instance, be used to pad the budgets of on-campus ministries.

The committee also designated subcommittees to look into financing, to create rules for off-campus spending, and to gather reports annually from the ministries with which we partner. Our chief finance member, Dawn Riedy, became an expert in the Outreach budget and even the church's budget as the church strove to neatly separate the two. This information was used to help each of our ministries understand better where their money comes from and how they need to track their spending. This was not an easy lift, but each ministry has agreed to become more involved in its own budget. Understanding how much money they have and how much they use allowed at least one ministry to stop amassing several years' worth of funds and use the money to achieve what it had needed for some time -- professional help.

Helping all this happen was a training session the Outreach Committee had with leaders of each of the ministries and some additional outreach volunteers. We also held a training session for new volunteers and will be looking to do this twice a year to keep people up to date.

Changes in how we do things financially were large and required a learning curve for our ministries. They, meanwhile, didn't miss a step in providing goods and services to our neighbors.

Goals for next year include additional training, coaching the ministries in doing self-evaluations and surveys of neighbors served, and continuing to enact the recommendations of "Continuing Our Way



Forward.” One continuing area of unmet needs in our community is housing and we would like to look further into that issue with the idea of creating a strategy for meeting some of the needs.

- Diana Carter, Outreach Committee Chair

Reports:

The Asbury First Community Outreach Center

January 2024 marked the 1 year anniversary of the opening of the Community Outreach Center. All of our programs built upon what was accomplished in 2023. We saw growth across the board: more food packed and served, more clothing provided, more physical exams given, more produce grown. One particularly inspiring note: the Dining & Caring Center launched a partnership with Third Presbyterian Church that has allowed us to extend our shower and laundry hours. I am hopeful we can find further ways to partner with other communities and organizations that enable us to similarly expand other aspects of what we are doing.

Off-Campus efforts

Our off-campus efforts continued to operate throughout the year. We continue to consider Miracle Garden, Habitat for Humanity, Cameron Ministries, Help Me Read, Keeping Our Promise, and Family Promise our adopted off-campus ministries. Project Chacocente has undergone great changes over the last year and our Outreach Committee is in conversation about how we can continue to have relationships and a presence with the people of Nicaragua in its absence. Reports for each of these ministries are attached.

Staffing

- In March of 2024, our full-time staff social worker left to accept a position with another organization. In the Fall of 2024, through a partnership with St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center, we partially filled this role with a part-time Social Work Student Intern, Tabitha Dollarhide. Moving into 2025, we have formally hired Tabitha in this role part-time for the remainder of her internship, and possibly beyond.
- In November of 2023 we welcomed Timothy Dunn onto our Community Outreach Center staff, sharing Associate responsibilities with Shannon Coleman.
- In December of 2024 we hired Lin Saunders on a grant-funded temporary basis to act as Health Services Coordinator, primarily working to launch dental services in the Community Outreach Center.

Timothy, Tabitha and Lin have been great additions to our ministry team and huge assets to our programs and the neighbors we serve! Moving into 2025 we are in the process of hiring a part-time Storehouse Coordinator.

Freedom Church of the Poor

We launched a local Freedom Church of Poor community in December of 2023 with a Christmas celebration and continued that tradition throughout 2024, holding services for Ash Wednesday, Easter,



Pentecost, All Saints Day and Christmas. These services pair religious observance with political education and community organizing. They include music, prayer, scripture, reflection and testimony from local activists and movements. The services have ranged in attendance from just a few people to around 30. We have seen a mix of church members, volunteers, neighbors and visitors from other organizations and churches.

Pentecost

For the third year in a row, on Pentecost we held a lay-led celebration of outreach worship service. A number of volunteers representing many of our different outreach ministries participated in the leadership of the service.

Rev. Stephen Cady, PhD

Annual Extension Ministry Report for Stephen Cady

So, this is different.

A year ago, I was writing my annual report as the Senior Minister of Asbury First, hunting down all of the other reports from people in extension ministry who hold Asbury First as their charge conference. Now, I am one of those persons.

First, let me say that I miss you all. What a gift it was to serve in leadership at Asbury First for those twelve years. Thank you for the way that you cared for me, loved my family, and dreamed together about how to do more good in Rochester and beyond. Every day I think about you, pray for you, and give thanks to God for you. While Emily and I are a few more miles away than we had grown accustomed to, know that you haven't been far from our hearts.

My year has been a whirlwind to say the least. After saying farewell in January and February, I began my journey South to Fort Worth to take on the Presidency of Brite Divinity School. I began officially on March 4 and have spent the last 8 months doing my best to get to know the Brite community, build trust, and help them start to dream about who they are and who God is calling them to be. It has been a learning curve, but one that I have thoroughly enjoyed. Brite is an unapologetically progressive institution in a community that desperately needs its prophetic witness and voice. Our students are remarkable and our alumni are doing amazing work. I am honored to be there.

The Presidency of Brite has both an internal and external component. Like congregational ministry, much of my week is spent in the daily minutia of administration, from working with students, staff, and faculty, to balancing the budget, to strategic planning. At the same time, I am meeting with community officials, connecting with local churches and nonprofits, and building stronger ties with partners like TCU. Oh, and I'm also preaching. A lot. I have lost track of the number of different pulpits that I have been in over the last several months, but I have had the opportunity to preach in dozens of different churches, conferences, and even a synagogue. While they are all different, and none feel as familiar as Asbury First, I have enjoyed every opportunity I have been afforded.



In addition to my new role as President of Brite, I have maintained my United Methodist connectional ties, participating in General Conference, attending the Upper New York Annual Conference, and beginning to make connections in the annual conferences of Texas. It's a different world, but the connectional system and our mutual faith unites us. Blest be the tie that binds.

Emily and the kids are doing well and adjusting to life in Texas. They send their love. It is different for sure, but it has reminded me of what I have always known to be true—there are good people everywhere in this world. My prayer is that none of us ever forget what it is like to be new.

Thank you for the work that you continue to do. I am so excited to hear about all the good that you are doing together and I can't wait to see where God will take you from here.

Sincerely,
Rev. Stephen Cady, PhD

Rev. Dr. Robert Allan Hill

Boston University, Dean of Marsh Chapel, Professor of New Testament and Pastoral Theology, and Chaplain to the University

January 1, 2024—December 31, 2024

A. Dean of Marsh Chapel: Preacher

1. Regular Sunday Sermons and Services, Marsh and elsewhere: **54**
2. Annual Special BU Services: **35**

ML King Observances (2), This I Believe, BU Baccalaureate\Commencement (8), Marsh and BU Matriculations (4), BU Alumni Weekend Service, Lessons & Carols (2), Annual Spring Term Prayers\Invocations (10), Inaugural Events (9)
3. Guest Speaking Events 2024: **25** Some Highlights: TriMilitary Ball, Chobanian Funeral, BU Commencement (various), NYS Lake Association, BU Inaugural, October 7 Marsh Prayer Service, Brite Divinity Presidential Installation, Union Chapel NH, Provost's Cabinet Retreat, CGS Matriculation, Boston City Council, Beale Funeral, Galea Farewell, Wildman Review.
4. Regular Meetings: Weekly, Monthly, other: **26**
Marsh Staff, Marsh Advisory Board, Faculty BUSTH, Faculty Area A and Area D BUSTH, Deans' Council, University Leadership Council, University Leadership Group, BU Faculty Assembly, Religious Life Council, BU University Chaplains, New England Annual Conference Foundation (and Executive Committee), Harvard Memorial Church Board of Visitors (in hiatus), Learning Project



Board of Visitors, BU Hillel Board. New: Summer 2024 Presidential Arrival, LOVI Committee and summer working group predecessors.

5. Visits: **811** (office, home, hospital, other, not including daily 45min campus walk, which allows various brief, informal conversations)
6. 2024 New Marsh Chapel Chapter Members Received **7** (Charles and ElyssaTift, Matthew, McClam, Baptizands).
7. Seasonal Program Initiatives, largely Staff led: **21** (*see website*) Largely full calendar and weekly program at this point.
8. 2024 Baptisms **3** (Yun Chan Kathryn Lee, Ziche Chloe Peng)
9. 2024 Weddings: **2** (Brides: EE AH Chenga, Sandy Boi Du)
10. 2024 Deaths/Funerals: **11**: President Aram Chobanian, Librarian Nasim Parvin, Neighbor JR Moran, Mother in law Elizabeth Williams, Parishioner Richard Russell, Students (Johnelvin Mwangi, Mali McKenzie, Xinyi Lee), Friends (Bill Tomek, Rev. Dee Hamilton Wade, Superintendent M Russell Lee). (The normal RAH\Staff\Marsh responses at death include: 1. Prayer and Visit. 2. T: Boss\Dean. 3. T: Widower\Widow. 4. Flowers sent. 5. Counsel session. 6.Funeral\Wake\Memorial)

B. Tenured Full Professor, New Testament/Pastoral Theology, STH: Professor

1. RAH Publications: 1. Sunday Sermons, BU website (at 2500 words\sermon, the collection for 2024 would be 125,000 words, or two 200 page books); 2. Autumn 2024 Sermon Series. A Look to the Future (arguably our best in 18 years) 3. Lenten Sermon Series 2024:: Fr. Raymond Brown (this is year 18 of the Lenten series, the first ten in conversation with Calvinists, this second ten with Catholics); 4. In print: Salt City Prayers; Partnership in the Gospel: Seven Exercises in Liberal Biblical Theology (my main comprehensive work in Biblical Theology, a many year project. 5. In cyber form (currently on the Marsh Chapel Website); The New Creation: Galatians and United Methodism, Appendices to 'Partnership in the Gospel', A Conversation with Marilynne Robinson at BU; 6. Other: various op-eds (BU TODAY, MSNBC, other), interviews, shared podcasts, other, three doctoral dissertations 2023 under RAH, published : Cooper, McConigle, Healea.
2. Courses BU/STH taught 2024: The Gospel of John (fall) and ITP (Integration of Theology and Practice (spring)); (since 2006 two courses\year offered gratis in STH, part of Hill family tithe.)
3. Pastoral contacts\calls with fellow clergy\others at Christmas: **88**
4. At something of a late date in my academic career, some scholarly work is being based now, in part, on my own work in *New Testament* (e.g. Greylyn Hydinger, STH 2022 dissertation) and in *Preaching* (e.g. Mark Baker, Centered Set Church), which is very gratifying. Jan and I are at that stage where our children are raising children, our students are leading churches and choirs, our assets are producing assets, our writings are producing writings, etc., *the last of life for which the first was made!*.



C. Chaplain to the University and Office of Religious Life: Pastor *Ministry (1)

1. Daily 45-minute walks on campus and conversations.
2. BU Today Articles, other Religious Life Articles (see Marsh Website, 'In the News' collection).
3. BU Matriculation, Service\Retirement Recognitions, Senior Breakfast, Baccalaureate, Commencement, Multi-faith Dinner, and other events (see above)
4. Pastoral Counseling: 66 (including sacramental and personal hours, part of total visits).
5. Annual Open Houses\Receptions\Dinners in 96 Bay State Residence: 11
6. BU Faculty\Staff Deaths 2024: (see also above): (President Aram Chobanian, Librarian Nasim Parvin)
7. Sampling of authors read in 2024: McWorter, Frye, Baldwin, Stanley, Brown, Guide, Backhaus, Caird, Eby, Lende, Clinch, Robinson, Twenge, Haigh, Boss
8. December Christmas\Holiday events 2024: 21
9. Travel, personal\ work: Quebec City, Venice, Tampa, New York, Maine, San Diego
10. Tithe (details available on request).
11. Regular Continuing Education Events\Retreats Annually 10: 2 UMC Annual Conferences (UNYAC, NEAC), 2 AAR\SBL (national, regional), 2 NHTDG (spring, fall), 2 BU retreats (Provost, STH), 2 Marsh staff mini-retreats.
12. PhD, DMin, and other degrees, reader-advisor-committee-other: 2. (Wit, Alonzo)
13. Two years ago (2022), also included the positive outcome of a five-year BU decanal review, with encouragement for further growth in two key areas: student outreach (including interreligious life and interfaith work) and continuous improvement in staff management. (*Note hence the new subdivision in this Part C, in this annual report, ministry and management*).
14. Goals 2024: *Voice* (a summative research project *Bay State Road; Sermons from Marsh Chapel* (this is intended to be published prior to and in honor of the Marsh Chapel 75th anniversary, 9/25/25; this will be 21st book); *Visitation* (personal visitation goal: pastoral conversation, 2 dozen a week); *both will continue as goals and foci in 2025; Also; **Marsh 75th Anniversary of Chapel Dedication (1950)(multiple)*.
15. Events: 35 Pre Commencement and Commencement Events
16. We have happily filled our last open Marsh staff position, for the role of Associate Chaplain for Student Outreach, Mr. Jonathan Lee (Davidson, Yale), (along the lines of the 5 year review suggestions). Knock on wood, a full, fine staff, right now.

***Management (2)**



1. Staff: 34 staff at Marsh Chapel; 25 Religious Life (self-funded).
2. Marsh Board of Advisors (22), meetings in May and September.
3. Administration: Oversight *through Chapel Director* of 8 University Chaplains and 25 Campus Ministers, 34 internal Marsh Staff (see sign boards and web site). 2 Muslim chaplains added this year, thanks to the generosity of the President's office.
4. Marsh Chapel oversight of Religious Life brings \$4M\year to BU in self-funded chaplaincies and campus ministries.
5. Annual Marsh income target set (and annually met) at 1/14 of expenses, 2015, w\Chris Goss, (after discussion, retained at this level, 12/18 w\Pat O'brien).
6. Monthly meetings with direct reports (5) rather than semester only (10 rather than 2). Chapel Director, Tuesday; Music Director, Monday; Chaplains (3) Wednesday.
7. We need to make sure Religious Life Policy is communicated at least once, preferably twice, each year, throughout the University (as done this September through the Provost's office).



Administration and Property

Governing Board

Working with the congregation, staff and pastors, Asbury First’s Governing Board sets policy and direction, empowers its committees and teams to carry out the work of the congregation, and works to coordinate and harmonize the efforts undertaken by these groups. The Governing Board has fiscal responsibility, acting as the Trustees of Asbury First. In addition, the Board President serves as Asbury First’s Lay Leader.

Each year the Governing Board focuses on several Big Questions that are vital to Asbury First’s mission and ministry. Early in the year, the Board identified the big issues for 2024 as:

1. Continued Momentum: Senior Minister selection/transition, membership growth, potential UMC General Conference decisions, fostering online engagement.
2. Financial Wellness: Stewardship/Budget Process Improvements, focus on a Consecration Sunday process (giving motivated by members’ spiritual development, rather than merely by the need to ensure bills are paid) and with early interaction with internal groups that may be affected by budget decisions.
3. Community Outreach: Now that the Community Outreach Center has been successfully opened, how to ensure it continues to thrive, attracts more volunteers, establishes adequate operational funding (including additional pledging and grants) and grows other outreach activities.

The selection of a new senior pastor was the most crucial factor in continuing the momentum Asbury First has experienced in recent years. To that end, Governing Board members were named as additional members of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee, the group responsible for coordinating with Bishop Burgos and District Superintendent Block on the pastoral search. PPRC Chair Beth Wilkens and Governing Board President Jim Quinn were chosen to co-chair Asbury First’s transition team, and they coordinated the process from the Church’s perspective. After an extensive, nation-wide search, Bishop Burgos and his Cabinet chose Rev. Dr. Michelle Bogue-Trost, who was by a considerable margin, the most outstanding candidate identified by the Transition Team. Rev. Dr. Bogue-Trost began her Asbury First ministry in July.

To ensure continued growth in the impact of our worship services and our arts offerings within both the Church and the larger community, the Governing Board successfully encouraged the establishment of a Worship and the Arts Team to coordinate the many groups within the Church that have a role in these two areas. In addition, in December the Governing Board approved a request from members of the Asbury First community to create a new group within the Church’s governance structure: the Social Concerns Committee. This new committee was established to address, advocate for, and lead the congregation in engagement with key social issues, including racial equity, housing equity, anti-poverty initiatives, LGBTQIA+ rights and equity, ecological justice and conservation, mental health awareness, and anti-war issues.

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In the area of financial wellness, the Governing Board, responded to firm guidance from Interim Senior Pastor Rev. Ted Anderson, and later from Rev. Dr. Bogue-Trost, by determining that Asbury First’s annual budgeting process and annual giving process should be shifted earlier, to late summer and early fall. As part of this approach, Church Staff or Finance Committee members interacted with groups throughout the Church early on to determine their financial needs for 2025 and to minimize any adverse impact from budget reductions. As part of the annual giving campaign, over a series of Sunday services, a diverse group of members spoke from their hearts about the impact of Asbury First and our programs on their lives and on community as a whole. Budget approval occurred at an Annual Conference held on December 8th, rather than in mid to late January, as in the recent past.

The Governing Board authorized creation of a Property Stewardship Endowment Fund to provide a vehicle for individuals who wished to earmark contributions toward the substantial, ongoing costs of maintaining our buildings and campus. This action was subsequently approved at a special Charge Conference in August.

In December, to advance the financial health of our endowments, the Governing Board endorsed the recommendation of the Church’s Investment Committee to make certain changes to our mix of outside investment advisors.

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Community Outreach remained a top area of focus for the Governing Board in 2024, and the Outreach budget was broken out separately from the general budget for both 2024 and 2025. After consultation with the leaders of the Church’s outreach activities, the Governing Board came to understand that obtaining grant funding to support the ongoing operational costs of the Community Outreach Center will be a challenge. Relatedly, there was an effort to see that costs associated– directly or indirectly - with outreach activities were reflected in the Outreach Budget. Members of the Governing Board and John Ormsbee worked extensively with leaders in the Outreach area to communicate the rationale for this change and its practical implications, and to make the adjustments necessary to ensure the process was fair to all concerned. In addition, the Community Outreach Center was authorized to conduct some of its own, limited fundraising activities, especially among sources outside the immediate Asbury First membership.

Submitted by Jim Quinn, Chair

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Financial Report

Asbury First United Methodist Church
Budget Report
 January 2024 - December 2024

CHURCH OPERATIONS

INCOME

	Actual	Budget	Difference	Notes
CONTRIBUTION INCOME	1,420,431	1,574,096	(153,665)	1
Bequests - Unrestricted	150,156	-	150,156	2
Trf: Memorials to AOP	21,350	4,000	17,350	
OTHER CONTRIBUTION INCOM	15,500	17,000	(1,500)	
INCOME FROM ENDOWMENTS	359,579	359,579	-	
PROPERTY USAGE	136,137	121,335	14,802	
OTHER INCOME	41,646	40,525	1,121	
TOTAL INCOME	2,144,799	2,116,535	28,264	

EXPENSE

PERSONNEL EXPENSES				
CLERGY	379,127	388,868	9,742	
NON-CLERGY	778,437	802,901	24,464	
Subtotal Personnel Expenses	1,157,563	1,191,769	34,206	
INTERFUND XFRS OUT	295,156	145,000	(150,156)	2
ADMINISTRATION				
COMPUTERS, NETWORK & DA	46,381	45,000	(1,381)	
COPIER & OFFICE EQUIPMENT	21,803	24,582	2,779	
OFFICE EXPENSES	9,746	10,350	604	
TELEPHONES & INTERNET	16,821	15,336	(1,485)	
POSTAGE	8,267	7,830	(437)	
AUDIT & OTHER ADMIN	11,917	15,475	3,558	
Subtotal Administration	114,934	118,573	3,639	
MINISTRIES				
COMMUNICATIONS	20,566	20,750	184	
CONFERENCE CONNECTIONAL	236,390	237,610	1,220	
WORSHIP & ARTS	9,602	13,150	3,548	
EDUCATION	17,720	24,700	6,980	
CONGREGATIONAL CARE	17,055	15,560	(1,495)	
Subtotal Ministries	301,332	311,770	10,438	
FACILITIES & CUSTODIAL				
UTILITIES	105,827	82,660	(23,167)	3
JANITORIAL SUPPLIES	12,078	10,450	(1,628)	
MAINTENANCE SUPPLIES	14,755	9,176	(5,579)	
MAINTENANCE SERVICES	100,895	51,077	(49,818)	4
INSUR & PROF SVCS	18,201	24,570	6,369	
Subtotal Facilities & Custodial	251,755	177,933	(73,822)	
TOTAL EXPENSE	2,120,741	1,945,045	(175,695)	
INCOME LESS EXPENSE	24,059	171,490	(147,431)	



Notes to 2024 Budget Report – CHURCH OPERATIONS

1. **CONTRIBUTIONS:** While we received 99% of 2024 pledges, we had budgeted for a large pledge from 2023 to be paid in 2024 from the estate of a deceased member, but this payment was not received. We also budgeted for another significant increase in unpledged gifts based on our history over the past several years. This trend reversed itself dramatically in 2024.
2. **BEQUEST:** We received a bequest from a deceased member in November. We did not use this gift to cover 2024 expenses. Instead, we transferred it “off-budget.” \$62,500 of this gift will be used to help balance the 2025 budget.
3. **UTILITIES:** We significantly underbudgeted electricity usage in 2024. We have begun tracking our meter readings in-house to get a better understanding of our use patterns. We have increased our estimate for 2025 accordingly.
4. **MAINTENANCE SERVICES:** We have exceeded our budget on this line for several years now. There are three main components to this line item, and we will be tracking them separately in 2025.
 - a. **Service & Maintenance Contracts:** This piece tends to be very predictable, but we are increasing our monitoring of these contracts and planning to compare options as their contract periods come due.
 - b. **Repairs:** We have tended to underestimate this piece. Most of these expenses are caused by plumbing or HVAC failures. We have changed vendors for our plumbing and HVAC services and will be looking to receive more effective preventive maintenance.
 - c. **Replacement:** This year we had to replace several pieces of equipment that had simply come to the end of their useful lives. We have not done an adequate job planning for the normal replacement needs of our mission-critical equipment. In early 2025 we will be analyzing our inventory of equipment and estimating an amount needed to be set aside annually to be ready to handle these expenditures without harm to the budget.



**Asbury First United Methodist Church
Budget Report**

January 2024 - December 2024

COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTER

INCOME	Actual	Budget	Difference	Notes
COC GENERAL CONTRIBS	119,165	95,000	24,165	1
Memorials Xfr IN	7,375	5,000	2,375	
Operational Fundraisers	30,091	25,000	5,091	
Foundations/Grants	69,020	80,000	(10,980)	2
Holiday Offering	16,131	15,000	1,131	
FOOD & CARING MINISTRIES	93,441	51,500	41,941	3
STOREHOUSE	96,003	39,500	56,503	3
UR WELL CLINIC AT AFUMC	980	5,000	(4,020)	
TOTAL INCOME	432,206	316,000	116,206	

PERSONNEL EXPENSES

PROGRAM STAFF - COC	156,266	207,337	51,070	4
ALLOCATED STAFF - CHURCH	92,643	95,462	2,819	
Subtotal Personnel Expenses	248,909	302,799	53,889	

ADMINISTRATION

COMPUTERS, NETWORK & DATA	18,283	17,898	(385)	
OFFICE EXPENSES	3,179	3,250	71	
TELEPHONES & INTERNET	7,357	6,664	(693)	
POSTAGE	896	870	(26)	
AUDIT & OTHER ADMIN	3,019	4,775	1,756	
Subtotal Administration	32,733	33,457	724	

MINISTRIES

COMMUNICATIONS	4,201	5,250	1,049	
COMMUNITY OUTREACH CTR	90,640	75,500	(15,140)	5
Subtotal Ministries	94,841	80,750	(14,091)	

FACILITIES & CUSTODIAL

UTILITIES	31,338	25,950	(5,388)	
JANITORIAL SUPPLIES	5,293	5,550	257	
MAINTENANCE SUPPLIES	863	2,624	1,761	
MAINTENANCE SERVICES	29,718	19,523	(10,195)	6
INSUR & PROF SVCS	5,761	13,230	7,469	
Subtotal Facilities & Custodial	72,972	66,877	(6,095)	

TOTAL EXPENSE	449,456	483,883	34,427	
INCOME LESS EXPENSE	(17,250)	(167,883)	150,632	



Notes to 2024 Budget Report – COMMUNITY OUTREACH CTR. OPERATIONS

1. **GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS:** This is an accomplishment to be celebrated! Heading into August we were significantly behind budget, but after a special appeal from Diana Carter our donations started pouring in.
2. **FOUNDATIONS/GRANTS:** While this line shows that we did not achieve our goal, it was due to an administrative decision made at the end of the year. We received a \$25,000 grant from a regular source at the very end of the year. We also received an unexpected grant of \$30,000 a bit earlier, so the decision was made to hold the \$25,000 grant to be included in 2025 revenue.
3. **MEMORIALS:** In 2024 we distributed just over \$100,000 of accumulated memorial donations to the purposes to which they had been designated by the donors and/or families of the decedents. This was an extensive project and included some funds that had been donated as much as ten years ago. About \$11,000 of this amount was distributed to the Dining and Caring Center and Grocery Bag Ministry, plus another \$3,000 that was received in 2024 was distributed. About \$40,000 was distributed to the Storehouse, and another \$9,000 was received in 2024.
4. **PROGRAM STAFF – COC:** In early 2024 our Social Worker resigned and the position was not filled. This accounted for the savings on this line.
5. **COC MINISTRIES EXPENSES:** These “direct ministry expenses” were over budget primarily due to food and supplies costs in the Dining & Carting Center. This was driven by an increase in the number of meals we served, and increases in food costs.
6. **MAINTENANCE SERVICES:** See the explanation given for this line item in the Church Operations report. The same conditions hold here.

Prepared by John Ormsbee, Financial Administrator

Investment Committee Annual Report

Role in Church Governance

The Investment Committee is charged with setting investment policies for the Church’s General Endowment and Restricted Funds, subject to approval by the Governing Board. It also provides oversight as outlined in the policies, including for the General Endowment and thirteen Restricted Funds.

Financial Overview for 2024

As of September 30, 2024 \$6,937,856 was held in the General Endowment, an aggregate of \$3,146,293 was held in various restricted funds (ranging in size from \$17,920 to \$771,879). Accordingly, total General Endowment/Restricted Funds are valued at \$10,084,149. This represents a \$571,572 increase



from 2023 year end levels. This increase occurred after distributing \$418,157 to the AOP, Capital Improvement Fund & other Restricted Fund donor designations.

Key Activities in 2024

The Committee uses three investment advisors, Manning & Napier, Alesco, and Canandaigua National Bank. It receives investment reports from the advisors at each quarterly meeting and each advisor meets in person with the Committee at least twice per year. The Committee monitors advisor performance against benchmarks, and performance is near benchmark targets, varying quarter by quarter among the advisors.

The Committee continues a long-term investment strategy that has returned well in excess of the Committee's strategic goal of a minimum 7.0% return over time. Studies of market swings over numerous cycles show that long-term market returns are dramatically better when investors ride out downturns rather than trying to time the market.

The Committee distributes 4.5% of the 20-quarter average balance of each fund (or the rough equivalent for newer funds) for the Annual Operating Plan, capital funds and restricted fund-designated purposes. This is a strategy generally accepted by endowments as a way to smooth distributions through market swings but also provide for long term principal growth. Thus, when the market spikes, distributions do not correspondingly increase, and when the market turns down, distributions are not decreased as much. The 4.5% rate used is more conservative than the 5% distribution rate used by many endowments. As previously stated, these distributions totaled \$418K in 2023.

ESG Discussion

Over the past several years the Committee has added an ESG component to our Investment Policy. ESG stands for investments that are positive from an Environment, Social, or Governance perspective. This positive focus is in addition to investments in a number of areas (such as tobacco, alcohol, and defense) already prohibited by our policy. Although ESG is still an emerging field, heavily nuanced, and without broad market acceptance of standard measurements, the Committee is interested in using our investments in an ESG-positive manner to the extent prudent. In 2024 the Committee continued to ask our advisors to report on ESG status within our portfolio, using one available measurement tool. Our portfolio's ESG scores have been relatively flat. The Committee will continue to monitor progress and opportunities in this emerging field.

Dreamscape Goal

Several years ago, the Committee established a Dreamscape related Goal of an aggregate of \$10,000,000 for endowment and restricted funds. That goal was achieved in early 2021. While the 2022 market correction dropped us below that goal, the 2023 & 2024 market rebounds have brought us back above our \$10M Dreamscape goal.



Review of Advisor Performance

This year the Committee has undertaken a comprehensive review of our current advisors to ensure that our endowments are getting the best possible return at an acceptable level of risk. We used a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to request detailed answers to 40 questions that evaluated the 5 P's - People, Philosophy, Portfolio Construction, Price and Performance. In addition to getting responses from our 3 existing advisors, we requested similar submissions from a number of other financial institutions. After reviewing the RFPs and conducting interviews with all candidates, we selected the 3 advisors that will be managing our portfolio beginning 1/1/2025. Two of our current Advisors were replaced, Manning & CNB, Alesco was retained and two new advisors were added - Clark Capital, a family owned firm based in Philadelphia, and Wespath, an Agency of the United Methodist Church.

Submitted by Patrick Fulford, Chair

Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC)

Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) Role in Church Governance

The Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) is a standing committee of the Governance Board. Its role and functions are guided by The Book of Discipline and the Governing Board Policy Book. The PPRC assists the Governing Board in developing employee policies, liaising with the Bishops on clergy and pastor evaluations and recommendations, ensuring compliance with applicable laws, and carrying out the staff grievance process as defined by the Governance Board policies. The PPRC is responsible for recommending pastoral compensation. It has no staff management authority and does not participate in supervision of staff or staff decision-making.

Activities During 2024

The PPRC, as required by the Discipline, played a pivotal role in activities following Rev. Dr. Stephen Cady's resignation effective the end of February. It coordinated with the District Superintendent regarding appointment of Rev. Ted Anderson who served as interim senior minister from March through June. The Committee worked with the Governing Board to create a detailed church profile to be used in recruitment of a new senior minister. The Committee provided insight to, and received communications from, the District Superintendent and Bishop during the appointment process. The Bishop advised the PPRC of his intention to appoint Rev. Dr. Michelle Trost-Bogue as new senior minister, subject to the PPRC's right to request reconsideration. The Committee reviewed written materials, multiple archived sermons, and other information regarding Rev. Dr. Michelle Trost-Bogue before interviewing her and unanimously accepting the Bishop's recommendation. Following the appointment, the PPRC initiated multiple transition and welcoming activities.

The PPRC is responsible for recommending pastoral compensation. As part of that role the PPRC considered whether compensation should be disclosed on an individual basis for members of the pastoral staff rather than, as historically done, as an aggregate. The Upper NY Conference provides



guidelines for pastoral compensation, including required benefits, based upon multiple factors such as education, ordination status, and tenure. The guidelines largely guide the compensation paid by Asbury to the associate pastoral staff, and for the senior minister, information gathered as to comparable positions across the nation. The Committee recommended to the Governing Board, and the Governing Board approved, disclosing aggregate compensation on an individual basis as part of the annual budget approved by the Church Conference starting with the 2025 budget. The Committee also reviewed the compensation paid to members of the pastoral staff and made recommendations to the Governing Board for 2025.

The Committee helped coordinate recognition events upon the respective departures of Stephen Cady, Rachel Dupont, and Ted Anderson.

The PPRC has started a review of pastoral roles and responsibilities, including possibilities for additional lay support.

The Committee meets annually with each member of the pastoral staff, and to date has met with Mike Mullin. Individual meetings are scheduled with the other pastors.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

*Beth Ela Wilkens (Chair)
Valerie Benjamin
Frances Bryniarski
Barbara Castle
Yvonne Colton
Patrick Fulford
Chuck Hanrahan
Alex Hunt*

*Helen Johnson
Kimberly Jones
Ike Jordan
John Nutter
Kristin Parkes
David Strong (staff)
James Quinn (Governing Board Chair, ex officio)*

Property Stewardship Committee (PSC)

Role in Church Governance

The Property Stewardship Committee (PSC) is charged with managing the physical assets of Asbury First in such a way that these assets are preserved, maintained, and enhanced in support of the total ministry of the church. Physical assets include the buildings and everything in them such as furniture, equipment, etc. As a committee of the Governing Board, the PSC is a strategic body which commissions work by architects, engineers, contractors, and volunteers. We are not the body who does the actual work, but we manage it.

The PSC creates, manages and maintains a comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which identifies and prioritizes expected projects. The CIP looks out a minimum of five years,



and is presented to and approved by the Governing Board annually. All changes to church property must be approved by the PSC.

The PSC manages the Capital Improvement Fund to pay for on-going capital improvement needs and the prioritized items in the Capital Improvement Plan. Each year a small percentage of the church budget goes toward capital improvement, and is held in this fund. The PSC also oversees the church's insurance needs and serves as the Building Committee when needed. The PSC has oversight of the IT infrastructure Team as well, which presents added funding challenges due to shorter equipment life cycles. In 2024, PSC also oversaw a revitalized Safety and Security Team.

The PSC expects to face significant challenges in 2025 as we evaluate how to address aging roofs and sound system.

Activities in 2024

PSC oversaw the following projects:

- Foundation stabilization and repair – 1050
- Refurbishment of Sanctuary Roof Parapets
- Warranty rework of Sanctuary front steps
- Repairs of sanctuary sound system
- Repair of North Welcoming Hall exterior steps
- Preparations for roof refurbishment on Ed Wing and Sanctuary gutters
- Repointing of exterior wall of Welcome Hall
- Repair of Welcome Hall planter
- New Maxhub for 1010 Red Room
- Paved driveway to garage
- Trimmed multiple trees
- New dishwasher for Fellowship Hall Kitchen
- Initiated Sound System Team to study replacement options
- Preparations for Columbarium building project
- Approved new signage on main doors

Teams we will interact with:

- Safety and Security Team
- Monday Morning Crew
- Pumpernickel Crew
- Technology Team
- Garden Team
- Community Garden Team
- Memorials
- Maintenance



PSC has oversight of any changes to the property

PSC must approve all signage on the church campus
All Preservation Board requests must go through PSC

Submitted by Chuck Hanrahan, Chair

Monday Morning Crew

The Monday Morning Crew's motto is "we fix things." We are a group of men and women who do repairs and maintenance that are essential to keeping the Asbury physical infrastructure working. We consider all requests and tackle most of them using the collective skills and experience of our group. Our efforts save thousands of dollars annually. We meet Mondays at 9:00 and welcome and utilize everyone, regardless of experience. We report our progress weekly to the staff and Property Committee.

Regulars in '24: Jim Connell, Jim and Bonnie Nolan, Jim Farrar, Dave Kennedy, Dave Kay, Ernie Dankert, Howie Holcomb, Dave Steider, Dick Wallace, and Bill Stata

A sampling of our accomplishments for 2024 are the following:

- Prepped and repainted walls in the Daycare Kindergarten room.
- Removed and replaced six of the emergency light units in the Education building.
- Designed, fabricated, and installed handrails leading to the Chancel from the Nave.
- Constructed walls in the Narthex and sub-Narthex to hide the abandoned elevator.
- Installed cinder block to replace a rotted window in the storage garage.
- Fabricated a desk drawer for the library
- Removed and replaced 12 defective touchless lavatory faucets in the Ed. Bldg.
- Modified the Narthex podium to house the Sanctuary hearing-aids & charger.
- Repaired many broken window roller shades in the Daycare rooms.
- Installed safety covers over the fire alarm pull boxes in Outreach Center.
- Replaced many of the door stops across the campus.
- Fixed broken tables, chairs, and carts that mysteriously arrived on our work bench.
- Worked on repairs for the dishwasher in the central kitchen several times.
- Performed extensive work on the 21 individual room heat controllers in 1040.
- Repaired the upper sconce light fixtures in the Welcome Hall.
- Overhauled the hinge and door-closing mechanisms on the Butler's Pantry doors.
- Read the utility meters each month to verify accurate billing from RG&E.
- Tightened and repaired handrails loosened by children playing on them.
- Recycled scrap metal from the waste stream. Hazardous materials disposed of properly.
- Fabricated four wooden access "ladders" for the Sanctuary's roof.



- Repaired drywall damaged by errant door handles & installed door stops to prevent recurrence.
- Tightened the seats on many toilets.
- Replaced several defective electric light switches.
- Replaced several downspouts on 1010 following theft of the original copper pieces.
- Installed an electric circuit for the new Gathering Space dishwasher.
- Removed decades of rust and painted the exterior railing adjacent to the boiler room entrance.
- Repaired Gathering Space ceiling damaged by a water leak.
- Removed debris clogging the roof drains of the flat roofs of 1040.
- Investigated and resolved dozens of reports of broken or faulty this or that.
- Installed a replacement faucet fixture in the Dining Center's slop sink.
- Repaired or replaced doorknobs and locks in 4 rooms of 1040.
- Repaired damaged walls across the campus.
- Repaired fire-door release mechanism at Storehouse.
- Diagnosed cause of overloaded circuits for the coffee pots used Sunday morning.

Submitted by Dave Kennedy

Membership Report

Asbury First Full Members as of 12/31/2024	2258
Includes new members in 2024	28
Baptized in 2024	17
Deaths during 2024	35

Submitted by Deb Bullock-Smith



Worship and Arts

Music Ministry

Dr. Carl Johengen, Director of Music Ministry

In the face of many changes during 2024, Asbury First's Music Ministry maintained a steady presence, continuing to enhance worship services and to provide opportunities for music making for an ever-increasing number of singers and players. As always, I share in the gratitude of our entire congregation for the dedication and talent of my colleagues, Duane Prill, Principal Organist, Assistant Organist David Strong, our soloists/section leaders Gwen Paker, Brenda Nitsch, Dan McInerney, and Jordan Bachmann, and my co-leaders Elizabeth Church (Asbury Ringers), Holly Temming (Children's Music), Carol Lamica (Youth Music), and Laurie Kennedy (Asbury Orchestra).

We are blessed with excellent music-making by members of our congregation who grace our worship with instrumental music. These include Annette Farrington, flute, Brian Donat, cello, David Temperley, pianist/composer, Jeanne Strong, piano, and Jim Farrington, trumpet and contractor for our Easter brass ensemble.

Asbury First Adult Choirs

Leading Asbury First's Sanctuary Choir continues to be a highlight of my work at Asbury First. We were happy to welcome a few new singers during 2024. I am grateful to Brian Bohrer and Brenda Nitsch, who stand by to lead Sanctuary Choir when I need to be away.

Between June 2 and August 4, Summer Choir enjoyed excellent steady attendance this year. I am grateful to Brenda Nitsch and Brian Bohrer who stepped in to lead Summer Choir during my summer vacation.

Personal Workload

Throughout 2024 I continued to accomplish weekly duties through a combination of remote and in-person work. Much of the work of composing Sunday worship, preparing bulletins, producing captions for live stream worship, coordination with our live stream Production Suite crew members, and other routine tasks can be carried out online. My on-campus work consists of preparing for Sanctuary Choir rehearsals, attending meetings (staff, Executive Team, worship planning), and attending to other details that require my physical presence. I continue to be involved in the preparation for funerals and memorial services, as well as other special services and events. I continue to meet weekly with the Technology Team via Zoom to evaluate and troubleshoot the Sunday live stream, and to plan ahead for special events.



The arrival of our new Senior Minister, Dr. Michelle Bogue-Trost, resulted in a few significant adjustments to our worship planning routine; so far our partnership is a very enjoyable one. I'm confident that Asbury First will continue to enjoy excellent and meaningful worship under Michelle's leadership.

I am grateful for my wonderful colleagues on the Asbury First staff for their generosity of time and overall collaborative nature!

Pianos

Our pianos throughout 1040 are in excellent care and continue to be well maintained and regularly tuned. The baby grand piano in Fellowship Hall has benefited from the installation of a humidification system which has helped it maintain its tuning.

Organ

Duane Prill, Principal Organist

Our wonderful Austin organ continues to serve well with very little maintenance. We did renew a tuning contract with Parsons Organ Co. but only paid for ½ of the year as Duane has done most of the organ "touch-up" tuning/maintenance and has not called Parsons in as of yet.

Our contract with the Eastman School of Music to allow students to practice on the organ during the week has been renewed; we will continue to reevaluate this agreement.

Asbury Ringers

Elizabeth Church, Director

The Asbury Ringers is the adult handbell choir at Asbury First UMC. We currently have 14 members. We had one new member join us in the fall of 2024. Our primary commitment is to participate and contribute to the Sunday worship services.

We performed three times in the spring of 2024 during worship services February 25, March 31 (Easter), and May 12. In fall of 2024 we played on October 20, November 24 (Thanksgiving In-gathering), December 22, and at the 7:00 PM Christmas Eve service. We often play from the balcony on Christmas Eve, but the past three years we have played down front, which reduces our stress and exertion on an otherwise busy night!



I continue to select musical selections that highlight the variety of ways handbells can be played. We have worked with flute and cello in the past, and this year we have had additional music with percussion, organ and a vocal soloist.

We are fortunate to have a strong group of substitutes who can fill in as needed either in rehearsal or performance. This is a huge asset to the choir and our ability to perform and rehearse with a complete ensemble. Some of these subs are former ringers from Asbury First, youth and adult, while some come from other area choirs. Barbara Howell, a member of the Ringers, has worked with me to keep the music cataloged and filed.

It is a privilege to work with this committed, enthusiastic group of musicians.

Children's Music

Holly Temming, Director of Children's Music

Children's Music had a great year in 2024. In February, we had a Winter VBS themed Bluey in which we focused on emotional healing through music using sound baths, handbells, and rain instruments. In the Spring, we presented a children's musical titled Esther, the story of how Queen Esther saves her people from destruction. We were so happy to use the stage that was set up for the intergenerational musical, Oliver, which provided much needed space in the chancel.

In the Summer our VBS theme was Summer Olympics and the children loved playing the timpani and handbells.

Fall enrollment in children's choirs was 15 in Hallelujah Kids and 16 in Wesley Singers & Ringers.

Both children's music groups sang and rang on Bible Sunday in November. They put together a wonderful service for Advent Winter Wonder Night with a special instrumental piece arranged and led by Laurie Kennedy. Christmas Eve Pageant participation was steady with approximately 56 children participating.

My goals for 2025 are to expand our musical instruments since they are, I believe, a big draw for children to our program. We could use more handbells and handbell books, step stools for our shortest bell ringers, and Orff Glockenspiels. I would also love to add some sound bath instruments (Koshi chime, sound ships, gathering drum, ocean drum, shruti box) and will continue to give sound baths in an effort to show children how to use music in meditation to help calm, focus, and center themselves.



Youth Music

Carol Lamica, Director of Youth Music

What an exciting year the youth have had at Asbury!! In the Spring, many youth participated in the intergenerational production of *Oliver*. Larry Dugan was the artistic director; I taught the music and ran the digital orchestration. This show afforded another opportunity for our youth to make great connections with adult members of our congregation. These connections forged relationships that have led to more opportunities for the youth to participate in other areas of our church. The youth and adults rehearsed for the musical on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday evenings as needed, as well as Sunday afternoons.

The Youth choir met on Wednesdays (and a few other days to accommodate the youths' busy schedules) to prepare music for Youth Sunday. In addition to Youth Sunday, the youth gathered to learn a piece of music for Cady's farewell party.

In September, auditions were held for the youth musical, *Newsies, Jr.* My job is to teach all of the music to the youth, harmonies, unison and the solo work. I spent a great deal of time working with voice placement with the youth as this show had some vocally demanding music. Twenty youth began rehearsing on Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons. As the production neared and we needed more rehearsal time, eventually we had a long Sunday of rehearsals, followed by nightly rehearsals for the final week. Performances took place on November 22-24 and were enthusiastically received by our audiences.

The youth will rehearse on Wednesday evenings in preparation for singing at the 4:00 and 7:00 Christmas Eve services.

Asbury Orchestra

Laurie Kennedy, Director

The Asbury Orchestra is a group of musicians at all technical stages that come together three times a year. Each time we come together for five to six Sunday morning rehearsals, and then share the results of our practice with the congregation at the 11:00 service once in the fall and once in the spring; additionally we share Christmas carols in the Gathering Center after worship in Advent. With members from ages 8 to 80+, we share not only our musical skills but also a bit of our lives. Each member is encouraged to do what they can to add to our musical voice. This year our membership reached over 30 players in November. I am grateful to Jolene Harrigan for taking over some rehearsals in my absence. New members who play band or orchestral instrumentalists are always welcome.



Asbury Community Theatre ***Dr. Larry Dugan, Director***

Asbury Community Theater (ACT) has had an outstanding year in 2024, marked by successful productions, expanded outreach efforts, and enhanced technological capabilities. Our mission to provide high-quality, inclusive theatrical experiences has continued to thrive, engaging performers and audiences alike.

Productions Performances

ACT produced and staged three major productions in 2024:

1. *Barefoot in the Park* (February 2024) – A delightful dinner theater experience that combined fine dining with a classic Neil Simon comedy, creating an intimate and engaging evening for attendees. In all we had 85 at the dinner on Friday night and 90 in the audience on Saturday night without dinner. The show was profitable and became the template by which we created the model for the 2025 production. While there were only 6 people onstage, we brought in some new faces to the church, and had an entertaining evening and utilized new lighting software for the production. There were challenges with having enough power on the stage for the production which was remedied later in the year by installing 4 new circuits to the stage.
2. *Oliver!* (Spring 2024) – A vibrant and emotional production that showcased the talents of our youth performers and brought Charles Dickens’ beloved characters to life. There were over 60 people in the production on stage and 26 more supporting the cast backstage. The community members that participated became active in some church activities and indicated just how authentic and welcoming the church was for those not part of it. These relationships continued throughout the year with the cast members supporting their fellow cast members in productions throughout the seasons. There were between 800 and 850 attendees at the performances and several new sponsors. The show ended up being profitable and helped finance new wiring in the Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall for live stream events year-round in both locations. New software was in place for the sound production as well, funded by the proceeds for the show.
3. *Newsies* (Fall 2024) – A high-energy musical that captivated audiences with its powerful storytelling, dynamic choreography, and inspiring message. This production introduced a new youth choreographer to the mix that was warmly welcomed by the cast and crew, several of which were new to the stage experience. We also had a master class for the cast in stage fighting and movement by a local artist that specializes in the art and works with schools and organizations in the region. We also capitalized on using the video equipment recently acquired by a grant to live stream the event. While the revenue was minimal from selling these tickets (about \$450), the ability to reach the members of our church and beyond was fantastic. We had people on the stream from several locations around the country. The production ended up funding new lighting software and equipment for Fellowship Hall and was cash positive in the end.



4. Grant: In the winter of 2024 we applied for a grant for enhancing the video capabilities in Fellowship Hall. We were awarded the grant for \$5000 and purchased to new PTZ cameras for Fellowship Hall. One of these cameras is mounted on the ceiling and the other is used as a portable system. The portable system was also used in the sanctuary as a source in the Christmas pageant for the first time this year. ACT invested another \$3500 from the proceeds from the shows to pay for all the wiring and labor to create the connections. We have applied for another \$5000 grant to expand these capabilities even further.

Financial Summary ACT operated with fiscal responsibility while continuing to grow.

- Revenue: Ticket sales, grants, and donations contributed to a stable financial outlook. As always, ACT is designed to be self-funded and contribute back to the church as much as possible. It was decided that ACT will help fund the youth music position for 2025 as part of its commitment to the church as well as continue to expand the technical capabilities of the venue. We are doing this while trying to maintain an affordable ticket price and not charging for participation as many of the local theater groups do. Our goals for 2025 include expanding our reach in the community by offering some non-production type offerings
- Major Grant: Secured an additional \$5,000 to expand digital streaming.
- Expenses: After paying the cost of royalties and rentals and various production costs, ACT invested in hardware, digital equipment, and education programs.
- In the end, the program was able to keep a fund balance enough to cover a production if there were an issue. The financial goals for this year are to support the Youth Music program and reinvest in technology and equipment so as to reduce rental costs for the project.

Looking Ahead to 2025 ACT is poised for another exciting year, with plans to:

- Continue leveraging digital platforms to reach broader audiences.
- Produce an ambitious lineup of shows, including a youth musical, intergenerational production and dinner theater.
- Strengthen partnerships with local artists and develop some of our local business supports.

Altar Guild

- The Altar Guild is instrumental in preparing the Sanctuary for weekly Worship, Memorials/Funerals, and all Special Services. Linens, flowers, and candles are placed on the altars. After services, the Pastor's study, Sanctuary, and Sacristy are cleaned. Altar flowers are wrapped and delivered to those in need from our congregation or the community. In 2024, the Altar Guild:



- Successfully conducted 1 business meeting and the annual spring chancel cleaning day in March.
- The Annual Installation of new Altar Guild members was postponed again this year until a complete leadership slate is in place. Instead, a Christmas Brunch was held in December where we welcomed 4 new members. One member resigned. We have 27 members.
- Coordinated and assisted with only 2 Sanctuary weddings. The Wedding Committee provided 1-2 assistants for each of the two weddings. At this time, there are four weddings scheduled for 2025.
- Special Services provided support to 13 memorial services and 1 funeral. Additional set-up for the following services – Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, 2 Older Adult Communion Services, 2 services for Election Time of Reflection, Longest Night, 4 Christmas Eve services, and New Year’s Eve. For the Highland Palliative Care Memorial Service, we only needed to light and extinguish the candles.
- Linens for the High Altar, Meditation Chapel, and Children’s Altar are routinely cleaned/pressed throughout the year.
- Special altars were created for World Communion Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and Palm Sunday.
- Altar candles - The oil in the Kerry candles on the three altars was maintained so that they burned properly for the 11 am service on 52 Sundays, for 2 weddings, for 14 Memorial services, and 13 special services. The oil in the Kerry candles in the candelabra was maintained so that they burned properly for 2 weddings and 7 special services. A supply of wax candles is maintained for weddings, where requested, and for Christmas Eve, and special candles are ordered for the Advent Wreath and the Christ candle. The Candelabras were used for 12 services.
- Flower solicitations are available all year. Donations continue to decrease. There were 60 donations this year compared to 65 last year. Congregant members were encouraged to come forth after service for a bouquet to share with someone they know in need. Pastor Kathy Thiel also leaves a list for flower deliveries as needed.
- Approximately 612 volunteer hours were recorded.
- Due to ongoing challenges in membership recruitment, the Altar Guild unanimously voted to continue the 2024 leadership slate into 2025 until such time as a new President can be identified. The Altar Guild co-presidents continue to be Martha Tuke and Ellen Williams.

Respectfully submitted, Martha Tuke and Ellen Williams, Altar Guild Co-Presidents



Discipleship

Youth Ministries

Mike Mullin, Minister for Youth and Discipleship

PURPOSE

Welcome. Celebrate. Serve. All.

The youth program at Asbury First is open to all 6th–12th graders. We are UMYF; this stands for United Methodist Youth Fellowship. Our mission is to welcome all youth to celebrate a growing relationship with God and each other, while joyfully serving in the example of Christ. We are built on the foundations of Christianity and we take our United Methodist Church slogan seriously:

Open Hearts.

We want all youth to feel loved and accepted in our group regardless of age, gender, race, school district, sexual orientation, religion, etc.

Open Minds.

We want our youth programming to be a safe place where all youth feel comfortable with sharing what's in their hearts without being judged.

Open Doors.

We want all youth to know they are welcome—members and non-members alike participate in our programming.

MAJOR PROGRAMS SUPPORTED

- Confirmation for youth in grade 8
- Middle School Youth Group
- High School Youth Group
- Youth Vocal Choir
- Youth Bell Choir
- Youth Musical
- College-Age Fellowship
- Annual Youth Outings
- Middle School Mission Trip
- High School Mission Trip

ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2024

Confirmation Class

- Seven confirmands were received into fellowship of AFUMC on Pentecost Sunday in 2024.
- Five confirmands are currently participating in our 2024-2025 confirmation season.



Youth Group

- Youth Groups – We continue to offer middle school and high school youth groups on Sunday afternoons from 12:30-2:00. This offers a convenient opportunity to connect Sunday morning worship with our youth programming. We have had many different adult volunteers help out throughout 2024, but retaining regular volunteers continues to be a challenge. Similarly, trying to run quality programming for two different youth groups meeting simultaneously is mostly impossible without additional staff support.
- Youth Leadership – Last fall we returned to monthly meetings for our youth leaders. These five high school youth attend monthly meetings to help plan our youth programming at both a macro and micro level. This is a great opportunity for both faith and leadership development of our youth.
- Seniors – We honored sixteen seniors who graduated high school in 2024.
- Youth Sunday – We had the opportunity to lead both an 8:00 am outdoor service and our sanctuary and live-streamed service in June. We had two seniors give sermons, and numerous youth participate in other areas of the service.
- Retreats – We still have not had any retreats since the pandemic. We did advertise and collect sign-ups for both a fall and winter retreat. There are likely myriad reasons for these retreats not being able to happen (including Casowasco's sabbath which canceled our winter retreat). Youth schedules have returned to their hectic pace, and the culture of retreats no longer exists that previously helped youth to prioritize opportunities like this. Without a known connection, there is little to invite or entice engagement. In part, this is also a reflection of some of the challenges facing our preferred camp and retreat center, Casowasco.
- Fundraising – We had our annual Souper Bowl fundraiser, and Pie for Pi fundraiser in the spring. The Park Avenue Festival returned this year as a Park Ave stroll, and we set ourselves up to offer parking. Unfortunately, it did not get the same draw as the Park Ave fest, and there were plenty of alternative parking options. The youth and families that volunteered had some nice time connecting, but we only made about \$20. This was a bit of a disappointment, since the Park Ave parking was historically our best fundraiser—raising over \$5,000 in two days.
- Senior High Mission Trip – In July, 16 youth and 6 adults traveled to Chicago, IL to work with Service Learning Camps. We worked with myriad urban ministries, including the Austin Garden Collective, St. James Cathedral, The Night Ministry, Care for Real. We even took an opportunity to visit the Bahá'í Temple. We look forward to sharing about these experiences at a luncheon on February 9th.
- Middle School Mission Trip – In August, 29 youth and 13 adults volunteered with Asbury First's vacation Bible school in the mornings, and then with local Rochester agencies in the afternoons. This year, the agencies included touring the Foodlink gardens, making lunch bags for Open Door Mission, and cleaning up School 17 after a break-in to their greenhouse. Following the week of service, the youth had the opportunity to travel to the New York City for an overnight where we got to tour Christ Church UMC and catch



the Broadway performance of Harry Potter and the Cursed Child. We look forward to sharing about all of these experiences at a luncheon on February 9th.

Youth Music

- The Youth Musical this year was, Newsies. It included an incredible cast of youth, and myriad youth and adult volunteers that helped make the show a reality. As always, this program helps to welcome new youth and families into the life and ministries of Asbury First.
- The Youth Choir and Bells have continued to meet on Wednesday evenings with opportunities to share their gifts and talents at worship services throughout the year.

College-Age Fellowship

- The youth group put together and sent out care packages to all of our 2024 graduates in November.

General

- Connectional:
 - Mike continues to be in conversation with local ministry leaders to think through how we might foster interreligious and intra-methodist offerings for our youth. This included attending a Leading Edge Conference in the spring (a conference for UMC youth workers at churches that average over 1,000 people in weekly attendance), and a Progressive Youth Ministry conference in the fall. We have also had some conversations with the local reconciling ministries congregations about getting our youth together for an event.
 - Mike has continued to reach out to the District Superintendent and the Conference Council on Youth Ministry leaders to re-instate our District Committee on Youth Ministry. These leaders provided an initial interest in getting things moving, but then stopped any further communications. I would like to take more initiative to get this up and running, but the institutional silence and my own limited bandwidth has kept this from happening.
- Outreach:
 - High School Mission Trip to Chicago, Illinois
 - Middle School Mission Trip to Rochester
 - Monthly youth service work, with a focus on our Asbury First Community Outreach Center.
 - We held our annual caroling event in December to two local resident facilities. This was a wonderful opportunity to greet members of our congregation that we do not see on a regular basis.

Additional Comments:

- In the fall of 2024, we shifted to a new model for our youth ministry meetings. On the first Sunday of the month, we keep all 6th-12th grade youth together to focus on a



relevant topic. On the second Sunday of the month, we break up into small groups for faithful conversations. 6th and 7th grades, 9th and 10th grades, and 11th and 12th grades. 8th grade gathers at this time for confirmation. On the third Sundays we connect in some type of service project. On the fourth Sundays we engage in small group activities that the youth can self-select into; some examples from the year include volunteering with R Community Bikes, learning to make applesauce, and playing board games.

- We continue to focus on the foundations of our ministry—fostering positive relationships. Youth ministry—like all ministry—is relational. We want to ensure that each week we offer time for youth to connect in both structured and open settings. We do this through service, education, games, meals, and free time. Each of these components helps us to ground our Youth Ministries in the core values of Asbury First—to live, love, serve, and repeat. We look forward to continuing to improve upon this groundwork in 2025, and to see how our programs continue to grow—not just in numbers, but in personal impact.

Respectfully submitted, Mike Mullin – Minister for Youth and Discipleship

Library Team

Our mission is to offer a comfortable space and resources where the Asbury community can learn about God, spirituality, humanity, religion, inspiration and challenge through books and other media.

2024 WORK PROGRESS:

- The entire Church Library collection is in the process of being inventoried to update the online database and notebook collection lists. The notebooks (sorted by title or author) enable library visitors to find books even when a team member is not available to help.
- We continued the online database of the church library collection enabling online access to the collection by the congregation. This effort provides remote access capabilities in order that the library collection information can be accessed from home, office, and other locations.
- We continued to promote knowledge and use of email access to the church library for the purpose of seeking and providing information regarding items in the library collection.
- We continued to weed the collection of older books and those in poor repair, replacing them with the same (up to date copies) or similar titles. This is a continuing process done on weekly workdays.
- We held monthly team meetings (by Zoom) to discuss suggestions for new materials, workday planning, fundraisers, library usage, and special projects.



- We continued to reach out to pastors, staff members, and congregants for suggestions regarding new books to purchase.
- We continued support of the children’s Sunday school and the youth group.
 - A team member is coordinating with Paula Dugan to read a story during “Children’s Time” to acquaint them with the library. We are also focusing on the genres of “mental health and LGBTQ+” for additions to the YA collection.
- The team emphasized promoting library usage by the congregation through displays, participation in adult education, special events, monthly use of our bibliocart, book fairs, publicity in the church bulletin and Thursday e-newsletters.
- A major effort continued this year to update, reposition, replace, or dispose of items in the collection. We have created a special picture book nook for the younger readers which we hope they will enjoy. We also continued to work on organizing the collection for optimal display, use, and function.
- An anonymous specified donation allowed us to enlarge our collection of LGBTQ+ books for children, teens and adults.

2024 EVENTS:

- A subgroup of the Library Team read American Carnage by Thomas Gabor and Fred Guttenberg. We encouraged members of the congregation to also read it.
- We met for 5 Wednesday evenings in October to discuss the myths that fuel gun violence.
- Barnes and Noble Book Fair Fundraiser: We will continue our practice of hosting a day-long book fair on December 7, 2024. This is our major fundraiser. This year we are privileged to enjoy the musical talents of Kathy and Patrick Schwar and Allen Hopkins during the afternoon.
- NOTA Farm Market Sale: The library team participated in the weekly Neighborhood of the Arts (NOTA) Farmers’ Market, selling donated and discarded books as a neighborhood service and a fundraising project. We made \$340.00.
- Christmas Sale: We also sold used books at this sale and made \$50.

2025 GOALS:

- Promoting use of the library by displaying books on the bibliocart in the Gathering Space on one Sunday each month. Having available lists of new books in our collection.
- Continuation of our contract with Resource Mate, which is a service that allows people to search the library catalog online.
- Promoting library usage by continuing to refine and upgrade our collection with new and appropriate materials, as well as providing programs and information on library resources.
- Participation in and promotion of any church-wide “reads” in cooperation with the Education team and Mike Mullin, Minister for Discipleship and Youth, and other church groups.



- Creation of special displays for seasonal and spiritual holidays, in the library, with accompanying publicity emphasized for special holidays and events (Advent/Lent/ MLK Day/etc.).
- Highlighting a “book of the month” in the e-newsletter each week.
- We look forward to another year of growth and will continue to search for even more ways to be a vital resource for the congregation, young adults and children. We invite all to visit the library and share with us any suggestions for new books or ways we can better serve the congregation.

Team Members: Chris Burton, Karen Cole, Monica Gilligan, Karen Hibbard, Bonnie Kay, Mary Beth Kelley, Meredith Pixley, Carol Roote, and Beth Woolever. Member Emeritus: Sharon Crouch.

Submitted by Chris Burton

Banned Books Team

This year, a Banned Book Team was formed that includes some members of the library team, other members of Asbury, and a few people from other faith communities (Faith UMC, Third Presbyterian Church, and Temple Sinai). The group originated when some concerned members of the congregation made a series of presentations on banned books during the Wednesday evening program and during adult Sunday school in 2023. At that time, the director of the Monroe County Library System, Patty Uttaro, talked to us about book censorship in our county libraries. There was interest among the attendees in more intentionally supporting the freedom to read.

In the spring of this year, a 20-member group began to work together more formally under the leadership of Carol Roote. We have taken a 3-pronged approach. Firstly, our “presentation team” presented an update about book banning at two adult Sunday school classes—one on what is happening at the national level and the other, led by Henrietta Public Library Director Adrienne Pettinelli, on what is happening at the local level. This team is also bringing in local author, Alex Sanchez, whose books have been banned, to speak on April 7, 2025 for a talk that will be free and open to the public.

Secondly, we have started a Banned Book Club that meets every other month on the third Monday at 7 pm in hybrid format. The only criterion for a book is that it was or is censored (challenged, restricted, or banned). This is free and open to the public and advertised in the Asbury e-blast, at all Monroe County Public Libraries (by poster) and at many area faith communities (by email). Facilitation is currently being rotated among Banned Book Team members. Participants are asked to read the book(s) ahead of time and come prepared to discuss it. At the inaugural meeting in September, *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood



was discussed. There were around 20 participants. At that meeting, participants were given a ballot to vote for the books of 2024 and 2025. The most popular book chosen was *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander. Discussion was held Nov. 18, where we had around 20 participants that included eight new people from outside of Asbury who had learned of the book club from advertising at the downtown library. We had an illuminating discussion that received a great deal of positive feedback from participants. There are currently 45 people who have participated or expressed interest in participating in the future.

The upcoming schedule is:

- Jan. 20, 2025 - *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
- Mar. 17, 2025 - *The Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman
- May 19, 2025 - Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*, along with her memoir *Shout*
- Sept. 15, 2025 - *Red, White, and Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston
- Nov. 17, 2025 - *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

In September, we will vote for the books for 2026.

Thirdly, we have formed a Freedom to Read Advocacy Team. We have made a list of the dates and times of public library board meetings and have begun scheduling times to attend these meetings. We want to express our appreciation for the libraries in our area and get to know the board members, so that if there is an attempt to censor a book(s) at one of those libraries, we can attend the board meeting in support of those seeking to ensure that the book(s) remains available. We would like to eventually attend school board meetings as well. We have made a list of independent bookstores in the area to hand out to parishioners in January (after the library book fair at Barnes and Noble). A bookstore that is locally owned and operated usually has a smaller inventory but also more freedom to choose the books they sell and therefore tend to sell books by more diverse authors. We are looking for other ways to support the freedom to read.

Submitted by Carol Roote

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Congregational Care

Older Adult Council

The purpose of the Older Adult Council is to provide opportunities for our older adults to enjoy being in fellowship and to stay connected with their peers, many of whom they have known for 6-7 decades.

In 2024, Older Adult hosted 4 gatherings at Asbury First:

- a spring worship service with communion, honoring those who have passed away since the prior fall, followed by lunch and a social time
- an ice cream social in July, including a musical performance by Charlie Bohrer
- a fall worship service with communion, honoring those who have passed away since the prior spring, followed by lunch and a social time
- a Christmas lunch with an interactive Christmas musical program by Jeanne Strong, as well as a social time.

Older Adult council also offered communion services followed by social time during Advent and Lent of 2024 at Linden Knoll, St. John's Meadows and The Highlands at Pittsford. These were open to all Asbury First older adults, as well as all residents of these locations.

In addition, two more volumes of "A Rich Inheritance" were published, celebrating some individuals in our older adults. These are our third and fourth volumes.

I'd like to take this time to thank the volunteers for all of these efforts. We've got a great team, who cheerfully step up to the challenges of each situation.

Submitted by Barbara Eltinge, chair

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Outreach

School #17 Enrico Fermi - Help Me Read Program

School Year 2023 – 2024

Current Program

This is the 9th year of Asbury First's involvement in the program. The Help Me Read Program is a partnership with the Celebration of Life Program and the Arc of Jesus Ministries. Volunteers work on reading skills with students one on one who are from impoverished neighborhoods. All volunteers participate in a training session prior to volunteering. Each session with students is about one-half hour long with most people completing two sessions per week. All students are matched with volunteers through a Help Me Read Coordinator at School #17.

Fears of lingering Covid 19 and violence on the streets of the City of Rochester have had an impact on the number of volunteers. Before Covid 19 there were more than 20 volunteers from Asbury. Although the number of volunteers then was greatly reduced we have been able to get some new people to help with the program. This past year we had over 25 volunteers and served over 50 children.

Goals for 2023-2024

An initial meeting is held each year to discuss our involvement with the school. A key discussion focused on the problem of school absenteeism. The daily average for the school is about 80% and it needs to be at a 90% level to help students achieve at their best levels.

1. Support was given to a special Spanish Education Event to connect parents, their culture, and education, emphasizing the importance of being in school. (\$500 - taken from existing budget)
2. A second goal was to help students with special activities for those who had 90% school attendance
3. Yearly school supply drive
4. Tyshaun Caudwell Memorial Scholarship Awards - 4 - 6th Graders (\$500 per student) supported through Outreach Committee
5. Increase the number of volunteers helping students
6. Reorganize Clothing Closet for clothes for students and families in need.
7. Bring youth group to help the school in the summer

All goals were completed except goal #2. It has been hard to get students to be in school 90% of the time. We collected over 25 boxes of school supplies. The youth came over to School 17 in August and did several activities. They reorganized the school clothes closet, reorganized the food pantry, cleaned up the greenhouse as it was broken into with many things broken and a complete mess, and weeded flowers around the school.



Future Goals:

1. Yearly school supply drive
2. Help improve school attendance
3. Tyshaun Caudwell Memorial Scholarship Awards - 4- 6th Graders
4. Increase the number of volunteers helping students
5. Talk with principal about future goals: book Fair, used book drive, holiday food for the needy

Submitted by, John Smalt, Program Coordinator

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Social Concerns

Housing Equity Team

Over the course of several meetings, the Racial Equity Team recognized that our congregation could not effectively focus on all the inequities in our community. The group decided to focus on housing. There are several compelling reasons for addressing housing equity as a logical choice for the Asbury First congregation.

1. Quoting Stuart Mitchell, "Addressing issues of inadequate, unaffordable, housing is in fact the core issue of systemic and institutional inequities that we live with today".
2. The Asbury First congregation has valuable connections with organizations that address housing issues and several members have meaningful work, volunteer and life experiences related to housing.
3. Systemic and institutional inequities in housing exist throughout our community, in both the city and suburbs. Because such a large percentage of our congregation lives in the suburbs, each of us can have an impactful role in our communities.

In early 2024, a Sunday morning speaker series was organized focusing on housing equity. There were three outstanding speakers covering the breadth of topics related to housing in the Rochester area.

- February 25: Nick Coulter: Co-Founder, CDO and Executive VP of Person Centered Housing Options. PCHO mission is to address, prevent, and alleviate chronic homelessness within Monroe County and surrounding communities using a housing first model.
- March 3: Ryan Acuff: Founder & Education Coordinator for the City-Wide Tenant Union of Rochester and Director of the City Roots Community Land Trust Inc.
- March 10: Stuart Mitchell: Retired Executive Director of PathStones Foundation and retired Pres/CEO of PathStones Corp.

The speaker series was very successful with over 60 attendees at each session.

In March, The Racial Equity Team conducted a survey of all those who attended at least one of the Housing or Vital Conversation sessions. (35) Individuals responded. That survey provided an initial list of individuals who wanted to become actively involved in a Housing Equity Team. It also identified people's top three housing equity priorities: homelessness, tenants' rights and exclusionary zoning in the suburbs "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY).

In April, the Housing Equity Team began meeting monthly. There are about 20 people on the team. Bob Castle is facilitating the group. Ruthellen Hoyle is helping to publish a monthly Racial Equity newsletter which includes housing information. Chris Linsner-Cartwright is the secretary/note taker. Several other individuals are actively involved in housing issues and provide updates throughout the month and at meetings.



There are numerous organizations in the area addressing various aspects of housing inequity. The team is not looking to strike out on our own but is seeking to find groups and organizations that we can support and work with. Several valuable connections have already been established.

Respectfully submitted, Bob Castle