

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Wellesley Hills Congregational Church
207 Washington Street, Wellesley MA 02481

2023 Annual Report

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AS OF JANUARY 28th:

OFFICE OF THE MODERATOR

Steven Patrick, Moderator (Through 1/2026)
Kristen Toffer, Rising Moderator (Through 1/2027)
Laurie Otten, Former Moderator (Through 1/2025)
Jack Morgan, Former Moderator (Through 1/2024)

SENIOR DEACONS

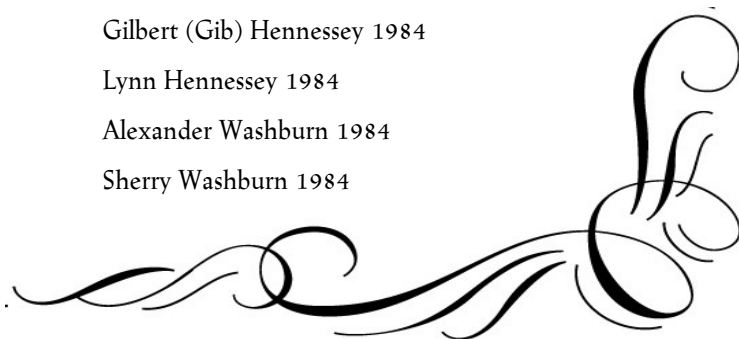
Barbara Farmer
PO Davidsson

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Members of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church

Celebrating 40+ years of Membership in 2023

Dwin Schuler 1944	Mary Ellen Dinwoodey 1979
Ruth Andress 1945	Marianne Faling
Betty Gulesian 1956	Carol Ely 1979
Keith Marden 1960	William Rybolt 1980
Katherine Babson 1962	Laurie Burke 1980
Robert Fleming 1962	Saranel McGuirk 1980
Natalie Garland 1966	Burt Payne Jr. 1980
Ellen MacColl 1967	Felicia Payne 1980
Lynn Perry 1967	Al Persson 1980
Donny Bank Jr. 1969	May Persson 1980
Lois Dotter 1971	Alice Wilkinson 1980
Ted Garland 1971	Harold Wilkinson 1980
Isabel Hooker 1971	Kelly Ford 1981
Christopher Ely 1972	Ruth Persson 1981
Priscilla Parker 1972	Sharon Stehman 1981
Theodore Parker 1972	Nancy Page 1981
Pamela Botts 1974	Margaret Kunz 1982
Katherine DeMarco 1974	Cindy Gordon 1982
George Rockwell 1975	Elizabeth Gorman 1982
Dwight Garland 1976	Frank Hays 1983
Ann Johnston 1976	Mary Hays 1983
George Johnston 1976	Beverly St. Clair 1983
Amy Kapinos 1976	Larry St. Clair 1983
Betty Ule 1976	Marilyn Morgan 1983
Anne Lysaght 1976	Meg Sweeting 1983
Cheryl Brand 1977	Rich Sweeting 1983
Richard Sidell 1977	Brad Tomlinson 1983
Donna Muzzy 1977	Mimi D'Angelo 1983
Greg Muzzy 1977	Gilbert (Gib) Hennessey 1984
Nancy Simons 1977	Lynn Hennessey 1984
Lynette Banks 1978	Alexander Washburn 1984
Susan Walton 1978	Sherry Washburn 1984
David Wimberly 1978	



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Rev. Jonathan Page
Senior Minister

What a year it has been at the Hills Church! I can't thank all of you enough for the warm welcome I have received this year. I have appreciated every meeting I have had with you and I look forward to building more and deeper relationships in 2024. It has been a true joy to be back at the Hills Church. I'm immensely excited for what lies ahead.

We have a lot to celebrate from this past year. Including confirmands, we welcomed twenty-six new members in 2023, which is the most new members in ten years. Our in-person attendance was its highest since 2019 and we had strong engagement for our online services. Our online numbers are consistently among the top congregations in the Southern New England Conference.

During Lent we had well attended and successful Wednesday night dinner and Taize services in Wallace Chapel. During the Easter season, we had a full range of programming that culminated in Confirmation and Volunteer Appreciation Sunday with our all-church picnic. Over the summer we instituted a series of summer suppers. The final supper at the parsonage had nearly ninety in attendance. This past fall we launched a small group ministry with a wide variety of offerings.

The biggest event of the year was our John Finney celebration weekend in June. We had the opportunity to thank John for his truly incredible ministry of thirty-nine years at the Hills Church. I personally am grateful for all John has done for me, particularly for his support this year. We are fortunate indeed to have found a worthy successor to John in our new Director of Music, Will Cooper. Will has stepped into his new role with enthusiasm and skill. The Chancel Choir's offering of Dixit Dominus for our Special Music Sunday was a testament to Will's hard work and dedication.

This fall Anne Marie Holloway and Judy Swahnberg both announced their upcoming departures from the Hills Church. I could not have asked for better colleagues. They are both supremely talented and I will miss them dearly. I celebrate Anne Marie's departure for the historic Allin Church in Dedham. They are lucky to have her and the skills she has nurtured at the Hills Church will continue to build the body of Christ in her new call. Thankfully, Judy still has more time with us and will officially retire in June. There will be ample time to celebrate her long history and transformative ministry in the months ahead.

As we look to 2024 there are several priorities for the continued health and growth of the Hills Church. The first priority will be filling the positions of Associate Minister. I'm grateful for those who have already been working hard on this process and I am optimistic about our ability to find the right candidates and structure for the church going forward.

Our second priority will be revising our programming through Faith Formation and Christian Service to find the best way to engage our membership, grow in faith, and serve our community. My goal is to find a consistent rhythm for the year that functions smoothly. Our collective goal should be to have the church run as effectively as possible where every board and team has a clear plan and vision and volunteer time is maximally valued.

Our final priority will be to continue to implement our new Realm database to support connections among members and the efficient running of the congregation. The progress on our database implementation has been slower than I hoped, but I am grateful for the Realm Implementation Team and the improvements we will see in the year ahead.

As we execute these priorities, I hope to continue to build on the positive trends in terms of membership growth and in person attendance. My goal is to be able to focus more attention in 2025 to evangelism and growth. But before we can do that, we need to have the right staff in place and the church to be running as effectively as possible.

As always, please reach out to me with any comments or feedback. I look forward to working together in 2024!

Rev. Jonathan Page

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Rev. Judy Swahnberg
Associate Minister

In 2007, twenty-one years after becoming a member of the Hills Church, I was ordained into Christian ministry by this congregation. I chose the theme of that service: “The God of Surprises” because I catch glimpses of grace around the edges... in both joy and sorrow, in the zigs as well as in the zags.

This is how I began my annual report in 2012, the year I was called to serve as an Associate Minister of the Hills Church. Over a dozen years later, could I possibly have predicted the surprises that were in store for us?

- 2023 was a year rich in welcomes, farewells, transitions, and hopes for the future:
- In January, our new Senior Minister, Rev. Jonathan Page, arrived! Rev. Anne Marie and I were delighted to welcome Jonathan back home to the Hills Church congregation.
- In June, we celebrated John Finney’s amazing decades as Music Director of the Hills Church with an elegant Gala, and then gave John a farewell blessing in the summer.
- In September, we welcomed Dr. Will Cooper as Music Director, and his talented wife Young to the Chancel Choir.
- In late summer, we learned that Rev. Anne Marie Holloway had been called to be the sole minister at Allin Congregational Church in Dedham. We blessed Rev. Anne Marie with a heart-warming reception on December 17, and said farewell on Christmas Eve.
- In October, after years of discernment and postponement, I announced my plan for my own long-awaited retirement: I will be cutting back to half-time after the annual meeting on January 28, 2024, and then retiring completely in June 2024.



Sacrament of Holy Baptisms:

I was honored to baptize 3 new members of the Lockberg family on June 11, 2023:
Gavin Gunnar Freer, son of Kelly and Brain Freer
Reese Louise Marques, daughter of Ali and Alex Marques
Theodore Lockberg Oak, son of Tory and Eric Oak



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And together with my colleagues, we baptized 3 brothers on November 26, 2023, sons of Lindsay and Ted Gibson:

Owen Hoyt Gibson, Henry Foster Gibson, and Griffin Hanes Gibson

Worship and Pastoral Care:

Leading worship continues to be a joy. Whether preaching, praying, or providing pastoral care, I am grateful for my call to ministry, loving God and loving God's people.

I officiated Memorial Services for:

- Maryanne "Burkey" Pratt, on February 25, 2023
- Mary Hill Canavan, April 5, 2023
- Elizabeth Robertson, on August 26, 2023
- Bettina "Betsy" Sechrest on September 16, 2023
- Barbara Erickson, on November 25, 2023
- and co-officiated the service for Shirley Marden, November 15, 2023
- The Hills Church staff also grieved the loss of Paul DePhillips, husband of Andrea Bellarosa, and hosted his Memorial Service on July 29, 2023.

Programs:

This year I led a wide variety of programs:

- Morning Meditation on Tuesday mornings, on Zoom
- Lenten Study of Wendell Berry's Sabbath Poems
- Sunday Bible Studies before church
- Hosted Steve Harris' program of his Israel trip
- Advent Study of Maya Angelou's poetry
- Caring for the Caregiver
- Connections-Women's fellowship
- Care Team
- Blessing of the Animals



With Susan Walton, Lucy Sur and the Senior Ministry Team, hosting a

- tea introducing Rev. Jonathan Page
- program focusing on learning new apps and improving our technology skills
- conversation about the joys and boundary considerations with relationships with our adult children
- festive fall apple tea
- hosting a Christmas Concert with Laurie Stewart Otten, Michael Calmes, and Dr. Will Cooper on December 13, and hosting a delicious and festive luncheon afterwards.



A year is so full of meetings and happenings, some of the special moments include the:

- Spring Tour of the Black Heritage Trail on Beacon Hill
- Blessing of the Care Team Members in worship and then hosting a thank you luncheon for them on September 17, 2023.
- Planning and hosting the Long Time Members Dinner on Sunday, November 19th was a true highlight of ministry. 54 members attended, and the attendees radiated gratitude and mutual care. When we counted the years of church membership represented, the total was over 2000 years of loving church!

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Wider Church:

The ceremony pictured is at Yale Divinity School, and with a stroke of 4 pens, and about a decade of negotiations and logistics planning, Andover Newton Theological School, as a Massachusetts entity, ceased to exist, and became Andover Newton Seminary @ Yale Divinity School. Pictured is Peter Salovey, President of Yale University, Greg Sterling, Dean of Yale Divinity School, Sarah Drummond, Founding Dean of ANS, and Hannah Kane, current board Chair, ANS. I have served on the Andover Newton Board for years and am now an Honorary Lifetime Member of the Board of Advisors of ANS at YDS. I was

Board Chair and then took part in initial negotiations of this relationship, so I am particularly pleased that this remarkable affiliation was successfully achieved.

I also serve on the Board of Ministerial Aid, supporting MA clergy in financial distress, and on the Schwartz Center's Compassionate Caregiver Award Review Committee, reading and ranking nominations for the national award celebrating compassion in health care settings among doctors, nurses, CNA's, chaplains, and teams.

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Rev. Anne Marie Holloway
Associate Minister of Youth and Families
2023 Annual (Prayerful) Report



2023 Annual Report

As I reflect on this past year in ministry, I give God thanks and praise for the honor and the blessing of being called as the minister to walk alongside our youth and our families for the past five years. I cannot help but reflect upon the multitude of wonderful and spirit filled moments we have experienced together. There is an abundance of generosity and care that is unique to the Hills Church. In my journey of ministry at the Hills, I have seen the face of God in each of your faces; the hands and feet of Jesus at work in your service; the love and faithfulness of the saints across time and space in our times of worship, memorials and prayer. What a gift it has been to have known each of you!

This past year, we blessed and sent off our compassionate Interim Ministers the Rev. Jill and Rick Edens. We celebrated the almost 40 years of music ministry of the magnificent John Finney. We welcomed the gifted and passionate Rev. Jonathan Page and began to plan for a new season in the life and ministry of the Hills Church. Lastly we onboarded the talented and kind Director of Music Will Cooper and kicked off a children's music ministry!

Through all the ebbs and flows of change, we continued to foster relationships and serve others as we partnered monthly with the Outdoor Church Street Ministry. We made and delivered meals for Family Promise. Catered, cooked and served meals to women and children in need through Rosie's Place. We shared our time and talents at New Life Furniture Bank. Our youth group and confirmation crew focused on the work of preparing for a service trip in Costa Rica, where we served to repair structures in in the Children's Eternal Rain Forest and provided programming and materials for a local school in need. We planned, we laughed, we fundraised, we donated, we sang, we prayed, we worshipped, we bake cookies and made meals and collected clothing, met people where they were and loved them fully! Let us not forget that we also unloaded 15,000lbs of pumpkins – which raised revenue for Indigenous Farming Communities in New Mexico, supported our denominations efforts for disaster relief through Global H.O.P.E., and provided future funds for service projects and trips for our youth.

Our Confirmation class welcomed in 8 new members and served all year in worship and in church led activities and service days. Our Youth served on support boards, read scripture in worship, led discussions and games, small group activities, shared meals, and planned for a new year together and what a year it has been!

As I plan to say goodbye, and answer God's call to do a new thing -- I continue to remain so filled with gratitude for so many of you. Revs Jonathan and Judy, you continue to bless my life with the gifts of a collegial ministry and friendship. Sally Tomasetti served tirelessly and faithfully beside me, loving our kids with all her heart and soul, mind and strength. Andrea Bellarosa's ability to make everything happen (and with a smile) has blessed my life and ministry two fold! Will Cooper's kindness and gift of song fills the sanctuary with beauty and holy moments of wonder. Mimi D'Angelo lifts up the lives of our youth, allowing them to be authentic and to know they are loved. Moderators and Deacon, Faith Formation and others, have demonstrated just how important community means to the health and wellbeing of all.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord shine his face upon you, and give you peace.

With all my love and deepest respect,

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway
Associate Minister of Youth and Families

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Church Council

In accordance with our WHCC By-laws, the Church Council is the principal governing body of the Church and has the authority between congregational meetings to establish and implement overall policies of the Church, coordinate activities and operations of the Church, and engage in long-range planning, among other activities. The Council also acts to convene ad-hoc committees and task forces to carry out special projects for the church when needed.

This year, the Council moved to a new schedule of bi-monthly meetings, meeting in March, May, July, September, November, December, and again in January. We continued our practice of meeting via Zoom, but it is our hope to move to hybrid meetings.

A Year of Transitions

Change is inevitable, as life and health circumstances change, but we as a congregation are becoming well practiced in the art of moving with and through change. As we are told in Ecclesiastes, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”. This year has been full of transitions and changes in both staff and clergy. It has also been a year where we have fully emerged from the isolation of the Covid years. We have been able to celebrate, grieve, study, make music, and most importantly, worship together.

Clergy Transitions

In December of 2022, we said goodbye to our co-Interim Ministers, Rev. Dr. Jill Edens and Rev. Rick Edens, who led us capably during the transition and search period. On January 1, 2023, Rev. Jonathan Page began his ministry at the Hills Church as the settled Senior Minister, returning to the church community where he was baptized, confirmed and ordained. Jonathan’s thought provoking sermons combined with his deep faith and enthusiasm for all things Congregational (especially meetings!) have brought a new level of energy to the Hills, and hopes for continued community engagement and growth.

We are very grateful for the work of the Transition and Search Teams that worked so diligently and with such faith and commitment on the Pastoral Search, and we looked forward to working with Jonathan to strengthen our community and our commitment to serving and loving God.

In September, Rev. Anne Marie Holloway announced that she had been called as the Sole Minister at Allin Congregational Church in Dedham, Massachusetts. Rev. Anne Marie has served the Hills Church for 5 years as Associate Minister for Youth and Families, carefully rebuilding our programs, and nurturing our youth through the pandemic with creativity, faith, and JOY. Her high energy, her exuberant and outgoing spirit helped us all to keep our community going when it was so difficult to be together. Although we knew we would miss her deeply, we rejoiced as she accepted God’s call to serve at Allin Church, beginning the first of January 2024.

An Interim Search Team, comprised of Mimi D’Angelo, Jack Morgan, Barbara Farmer, Laurie Otten and Rev. Jonathan Page began work in October to find an Interim Minister who will work with both Rev. Jonathan and Rev. Judy to support the work of the church. We will welcome Rev. Katie Omberg to the Hills Church starting April 8, 2024.

In December, a Search Team for a Settled Associate Minister was approved by the Spiritual Care Support Board. Members of the Search Committee are: Rev. Jonathan Page, Lynette Banks, Kristin Der, Lori Janiuk, Clint Liebenberg, Steven Patrick, Anna Thomas, and Susan Walton. They have begun work to find a new settled Associate, with the hope that they will be successful by summer.

In October, Rev. Judy Swahnberg, Associate Minister, announced that the time has come for her to retire. Rev. Judy has a long association with the Hills Church, beginning in 1986 when she and husband Carl Novotny joined the church. After beginning seminary on September 11, 2001, Rev. Judy served as seminarian and was ordained at the Hills Church,, eventually coming back to serve as Associate Minister in 2011. It is time now for her to spend more time with her growing family (she and Carl have just welcomed

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their 10th grandchild). We are so grateful for the caring, compassionate pastoral care that Judy has given over the last thirteen or so years.

Rev. Judy will reduce her role to half time after the Annual Meeting, and will fully retire at the end of June 2024. This tiered approach will allow time for a smooth clergy transition. Together with Rev. Jonathan, the Deacons and a team of lay leaders will be implementing a plan to make sure that the needs of the congregation are met.

Staff Transitions

In June, at a star studded Gala, we celebrated Director of Music John Finney, and his long tenure at the Hills Church. After 39 years of leading the Chancel Choir and the music programs of the church, and providing inspiration and leadership from a well of deep faith and remarkable talent, John felt it was time to retire. He continued to support our worship through the summer, until our new Director of Music could begin. Meanwhile, a committee was established in coordination with the Spiritual Care Support Board to search for a new Director of Music. In August, Dr. Will Cooper was hired, and began work at the Hills Church. Will has quickly endeared himself to all with his gentle manner, his joyful improvisations on hymns and his own compositions. For Special Music Sunday, he challenged the Chancel Choir to learn and present an amazingly difficult work, Dixit Dominus, by G. F. Handel, a challenge the choir met with hard work and determination. In addition, he has established a Children's Choir which now meets Wednesdays, and was recently heard at our Christmas Concert, along with the Cherub Choir, the Hills Bells and the Chancel Choir. It is a welcome joy to hear our children's voices raised in the songs of our faith.

The creative, joyful and energetic Sally Tomasetti is now the Director of Children's Ministry, and her position has increased to $\frac{3}{4}$ time. Joe Brady, formerly facilities manager, left the Hills Church's employ to take a full time job elsewhere, but continues to be on call, remotely, to work with Administrator Andrea Bellarosa to monitor the HVAC systems, and John Dooley is now the sole employee in the Finance Office.

2023 Annual Meeting

Our January Annual Meeting was successfully held once again in the Hybrid format, thanks to the hard work of clergy, staff, and volunteers. Attendance continues to be strong, using the hybrid format. Reports of the various Boards and Ministry Teams were received, a slate of officers and Special Ministry Team Members were voted in, a budget for 2023 was adopted, and a Bylaw was adopted creating the office of Clerk Emeritus, with Rich Sweeting holding that office.

Financial Situation 2023 and looking forward

The year 2023 was predicted to be a challenging year both for stewardship and spending according to last year's Annual Report. And so it has been. But expenses have been controlled as much as possible, and Nursery School enrollment and tuition, along with continued grants from the Commonwealth for preschool all contributed to better than expected revenue growth. For the third year in a row, and the fifth year in the last ten, no draw was required from the endowment.

As detailed in the Stewards Report, 2024 is also expected to be challenging, both for stewardship and spending. Church Council and the Stewards Support Board will continue to carefully manage expenses, and have kept many line items at the same level as the 2023 budget, but the majority of our expenses are for human resources – our clergy and staff – and the maintenance, upkeep and insuring of our facility. Christian Service-related spending is an important part of our mission. It bears repeating that, thanks in part to a better than expected contribution from the Nursery School, as well as unbudgeted grants from the Commonwealth, no draw was needed from the endowment this past year. The 2024 budget does include a potential endowment draw, but the expectation is that it will be below the 4% target*.

We will continue to focus on supporting the work of our excellent clergy and staff, strengthening programs that nurture our faith, growing our membership and nurturing a new generation of givers, including leadership givers.

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A plan for potential Parish House renovations was put on hold this past year, but the hope is that it will be taken up again soon. Plans are for limited renovations, particularly the rest rooms which will benefit all, bring us in compliance with inclusive access requirements, enhance our already wonderful Church School experience, and allow expansion of the Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills.

*Each year the Church intends to draw from the Endowment not more than 4% of the three year average of the total investment funds. The Church did not draw from the Endowment during the three years 2021 to 2023 and was able to restore some of the monies withdrawn earlier during the renovation campaign.

Leadership Retreat

In early March, we held an in-person Leadership Retreat, the first since March of 2020. Attendance and energy were high as we lifted up several questions for thought and discussion, and brain stormed ways to strengthen our church. It was good to be together!

New Initiatives

The Hills Church has a new Database, REALM, but it has taken some time to transfer over from our previous database. A REALM Launch team has been formed to work on ways to help members log-in, create profiles, and confidently use Realm. It is our hope that by the time of Annual Meeting, the launch will be well underway. With gratitude to Doug Eisenhart, Susie Alexander, Chris Stowell, P-O Davidsson, Jason Kranker and Rev. Jonathan Page.

The Stewards Support Board will support two new ministry teams:

Development Ministry Team, which will coordinate fund-raising efforts of the church, and Property Ministry Team, which will support and work with Church Administrator Andrea Bellarosa in identifying and facilitating property issues.

Thanks, and Acknowledgements

In March of 2023, we mourned the loss and celebrated the life of former Moderator Mary Hill Canavan. Mary was an inspiring leader as we moved into the new governance model, as well as being a deeply spiritual person, who shared her faith and love through service to the Church, and through the Meditation Group. I miss her encouragement, her wisdom and her beautiful and compassionate spirit in things earthly and spiritual.

In 2022, we lost Sarah Pedersen, at the time serving as Former Moderator. A group of her Wellesley College friends have provided the Hills Church with a lovely bench, placed on the front lawn, and dedicated in May "In Loving Memory" of Sarah, "a light in all our lives."

It has been a joy and a privilege to work with all the dedicated and talented members of the Church Council. I have especially appreciated the guidance and wisdom of Jack Morgan (Former Moderator), Steven Patrick (Rising Moderator), our wonderful and inspiring clergy and dedicated staff, the Senior Deacons, the Support Board Chairs, and the tremendous work of all those volunteers who give heart & energy to our church. I look forward to serving in 2024 as the Former Moderator and continuing to support Steven Patrick, who will become Moderator after the January 28, 2024 Annual Meeting, and Kristen Toffer, who will become Rising Moderator.

In Service and in Faith,
Laurie Stewart Otten Moderator

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Church Clerk

At the Annual Meeting on January 29, 2023, Rich Sweeting was elected Clerk Emeritus after being Clerk of the Hills Church for many decades. His knowledge of our history, polity, and practice is irreplaceable. As Clerk Emeritus, he is a source of counsel and knowledge to our regularly elected Clerk and Assistant Clerk, and is available to perform their duties under the bylaws in their absence. He is a voting member of Church Council.



Report of membership as of January 1, 2023.....	611
Received: All sources, including New Members, Confirmands, and Transferees	26
Losses:	
Deaths	5
Removed/Transferred out.....	4
Final membership as of December 31, 2023	628

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Ford, Clerk

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Communications Ministry Team

The primary service provided by the Communications Ministry Team (CMT) is graphic design and production. Design services include development of mailings, cards, envelopes, letterheads, Orders of Worship, logos, invitations, name tags, and a broad array of other items as needed, including fliers, posters, wall banners, pop-up floor banners, spiral and perfect-bound books and booklets, and more. The services include not just design but contracting for and oversight of production.

The calendar year 2023 did not see quite as many special projects as in 2022, which included the call of a new Senior Minister and celebration of the church's 175th Anniversary. However, the typical church year activities called for multiple design projects and the production of associated pieces. See the graphics below for sample designs from the following projects:

- Children's Choir banners
- Pumpkin Patch signage
- Christian Service Support Board flier
- Stewardship logo
- Thanksgiving Prayer card
- Advent Events card

During the coming year the CMT expects to fulfill similar projects that assist the church in marketing these activities and events central to the life of the Hills Church. We also hope to participate in other areas of church communications, including the church website and the new REALM database licensed by the church and scheduled to be launched to the congregation early in the New Year.

The CMT thanks members of the church staff and congregation for their partnership during the past year on projects that reflect the rich life and diversity of the Hills Church. We look forward to the year ahead and more fulfilling projects.

Prayerfully Submitted,
Doug Eisenhart, Co-Leader
Noreen Young, Co-Leader

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Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee works with the Senior Minister, Office of the Moderator, church staff, support boards and other committees to define job responsibilities, recruit staff, and set competitive and equitable compensation levels for the church's clergy and staff. In addition, the Committee helps to establish parameters for job reviews and performance evaluations, seeks legal advice, when necessary, on employment law issues, provides a confidential and constructive forum for the discussion of issues relating to the effective functioning of our staff, and helps organize employee appreciation events.

One of the key responsibilities of the Committee is reviewing and incorporating competitive market data to ensure that compensation for all categories of Hills Church employees - both non-clergy and clergy – is competitive, fair, and equitable. The Committee is also responsible for ensuring that employee benefits offered to church staff members, e.g., health insurance, vacation days, are competitive and appropriate. In addition, the Committee is responsible for ensuring the church's policies comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

This year the Personnel Committee assisted with the hiring of the new Music Director, the Interim Associate Minister, and the realigning of some of the church staff. The committee also researched and worked on updating the employee handbook which is expected to be approved by the church council in early 2024. The committee also developed agreements with the choir soloists and worked with the Music Director on the compensation structure for the choir soloists to support the search for two new soloists.

Members of the Personnel Committee in 2023 were: Ruth Persson, Chair; members at large: Gintas Vildzius, Linda Thomas; from the moderators: Laurie Otten; from the senior deacon: Steve Groff; from Stewards: Alex Kolb; and the Senior Minister: Jonathan Page.

Thank you to everyone for your time and efforts on behalf of our church.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Persson
Chair

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Participation and Involvement

The mission of the Participation and Involvement Special Ministry Team(P&I) is to foster participation in all church activities and Ministry Teams, encouraging people to recognize their own calls to support the work of the church, to grow in their own leadership capacity, and to find their own passion for God's work in our midst and in the world.

P&I is responsible for helping to identify a slate of nominees for the Church Council and Offices of the Church, and for the four elected leadership boards (Spiritual Care, Faith Formation, Christian Service, and Stewards) as well as Special Ministry Teams that we both celebrate and present at the Annual Meeting in January. P&I also works with the congregation at large, as well as with our Support Boards, Ministry Teams, and other governing bodies, to help match those who want to serve with those Boards and Teams with needs for service.

This year

In January, we presented a full and dynamic slate of leaders at the Annual Meeting that was unanimously approved by the congregation.

We created calendar deadlines for leaders to let us know their plans for filling positions on their Boards and Ministry Teams.

We worked closely with Rev. Jonathan Page and the associate ministers to discuss ways that the Boards/Teams could function more efficiently and effectively.

We explored ways to reach out to New Members.

We continued to help members of the church to understand our church's leadership structure and to view some of the many ways members can further our church's mission to care for each other, to nurture each other spiritually and emotionally and to reach out beyond the church's walls to bring Christ's love and care into the larger community.

In a time when many of us choose to worship and participate virtually, our job to reach church members is multi-faceted— so we have continued to explore creative ways to reach out.

Please contact P&I directly, or contact any person in a position of leadership at the church (ministers, staff, lay leadership) if you have an interest in serving in any particular way, if you have an idea for a new Ministry Team, or if you want help exploring your own call to service.

As ever, we are grateful for all those who volunteer and serve the church so willingly! We are particularly grateful for those who have agreed to serve in the coming year, whether it be on an elected board – or a Ministry Team – or in any other capacity for the church. Thank you!

Kevin Groppe, Debby Karlson, Becky Lockwood

2023 Annual Report

Racial Justice

In 1848, the founding members of this congregation shared a commitment to the abolition of slavery in the United States, and a pledge to the abolitionist cause was a requirement of membership in the church. In continuation of our heritage, Church Council has called for the formation of a new Racial Justice Working Group within the church. The Racial Justice Working Group was formed in 2020 as an actionable and prayerful response by our faithful community to the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. All that we have done and continue to do is in support of our congregation's efforts toward the work of becoming an anti-racist church.

Love is at the heart of our ministry together at the Hills church. Without love, there is no justice. Jesus embodied what God's love truly looked like and we are called to do the same. Jesus summarizes the most important commands of the Christian faith which are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength". The second is this; "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." It is in this mandate of Jesus, that the Racial Justice Working Group finds its focus and its mission.

The Racial Justice Working Group continues to initiate opportunities for discussion and education and serves to recommend practical steps for the church to continue our ministry of racial justice. As we look ahead, we have committed to the following strategic plan and the next steps we will take to live out our mission and vision.

Our Mission (the "business" we are in to work toward our vision)

As people of faith and followers of Jesus, filled with love, members of the Racial Justice Working Group seek to be builders of a just world for all.

Our Vision (our dream for the future which comes from our hearts)

The Racial Justice Working Group makes the commitment to celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion, healing our hearts as we live into the promise of God's Beloved Community.

Our Values that will Guide Us

Everything we do as a church will be done with the idea of inclusion and diversity.

We will strive to work with:

Open eyes
Softened hearts
Humility
Courage

Goals: (what we will do to realize our vision)

Tell the truth about our racial history.

Take intentional actions to become anti-racist.

Recognize, and be attentive to, disordered imaginations that nurture and passively permit racism.

With our dream and goals in mind we offered these activities in 2023:

1. Discussed impact of multicultural and multiethnic Nativity Photos and Display
2. Hosted MLK breakfast

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2023 Annual Report

3. Group viewed the movie Till and considered whether this should be something all church members were invited to watch followed by a discussion
4. Offered African American Heritage Trail walk (see photo below)
5. Discussed use of Harvard Bias Test
6. Discussed Jonathan preaching about unconscious bias and microaggressions.
7. Group took test on Implicit Bias and discussed results
8. Some members are participating monthly with UUA Black Lives Matter Vigils
9. Began listening to training by Dr. Ken Hardy focusing on engaging in difficult conversations about race.
10. Angela Bahns presented on engaging in difficult conversations.



For 2024

We are in the process of reinvigorating and reimagining ministries of justice. The Racial Justice Working Group will continue to work together with the church community to realize our vision of seeking, creating, and living into the promise of God's Beloved Community, celebrating diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Faithfully submitted,

Anne Marie Andrews, Mimi D'Angelo, Kelly Ford, Lori Januik, KC Kranker, Laurie Otten, Rev. Jonathan Page, Kerz Poku, Nana Poku, Rev. Judy Swahnberg, Liz Sweeting

2023 Annual Report

Reopening Task Force

The Re-Opening Task Force has continued to monitor the COVID-19 public health data provided by the MA Department of Public Health (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting>) and the levels of COVID-19 RNA in the wastewater in eastern MA as measured by the MWRA (<https://www.mwra.com/biobot/biobotdata.htm>). In addition, the Task Force has continued to track changes in the recommendations issued by the CDC and the Commonwealth.

In 2023 we were able to gather for worship and fellowship with no restrictions. We only issued possible Covid exposure notifications twice, early in the year. The Task Force has ceased issuing these notifications for several reasons. Although the level of COVID in the Boston Metro area has been rising gradually over the past several months, it remains relatively low. The incidence of serious morbidity and mortality has not been rising, however. This may be due to the high level of immune resistance to COVID in the population which has resulted from high rates of vaccination and/or previous infection.

In 2024, the Task Force will request that Church Council decommission the group. Members of the Task Force will continue to monitor the public health data, and review any new COVID-related health recommendations issued by the Commonwealth and the CDC. If changes in the situation warrant, Church Council or other concerned parties in the congregation or staff could request the revival of the Task Force on an ad hoc basis.

Respectfully submitted, The Re-Opening Task Force:

Rob Andrews, Mimi D'Angelo, Anne Marie Holloway, Chris Stowell, Judy Swahnberg, Sally Tomasetti, Elaine Vildzius.

2023 Annual Report

Safe Church Ministry Team

Mission

It is our mission to provide a safe and positive environment for the members of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church. As people of faith all church members have an obligation to respect the dignity of every human being. Where the young members of our church are involved, who may be particularly vulnerable, we expect the adults of the church community to always consider the health and wellbeing of these children and youth.

2023 Accomplishments

We welcomed new team members to the Safe Church Committee; Paul Bruchez. Continued discussion about the potential for a need for additional safety procedures in relation to outside threats. Attended SNECUC church safety workshop and shared findings with Church Council.

Hopes for 2024

Discuss and implement updates to church security system recommended by the WPD (2022) report. Continue discussions surrounding balancing church safety and maintaining an open and welcoming church. Review and potentially implement facility security infrastructure. Discuss and potentially implement new training procedures for outside threats.

Members

Barbara Farmer, Karl Karlson, Nick Bahns, Anne Marie Holloway

Respectfully Submitted,

Nick Bahns (Chair)

2023 Annual Report

Spiritual Care Support Board (Board of Deacons)

We rejoice in the many blessings of our church: strong, contemplative and inspirational liturgy; joyful, exuberant, meditative music; supportive youth and children's ministries where young people can build spiritual foundations for life's journeys; a commitment to outreach programs that serve our community and the wider world.

2023 has been a year of significant change surprise, rejoicing and sorrow.

Personnel Transitions

We offered a joyful and exuberant welcome to **Rev. Jonathan Page**, our fifteenth Settled Minister on January 1, 2023, and celebrated with him his installation on April 23, 2023. Baptized, confirmed and ordained in our church, he has returned to serve with a passion for preaching the word, nurturing community, and a deep commitment to addressing issues of equity, racism, and inequality.

We rejoiced in welcoming **Dr. William Cooper** as our new Director of Music, whose first church service with us was on August 27, 2023. An award-winning composer, virtuoso organist and improviser, skilled conductor, and beloved educator, Will believes that "hymn playing and singing should be sensitive to the poetry and drama of the text, and should invite robust congregational participation." We look forward to singing many hymns together with Will.

We sadly bid farewell to our much beloved Director of Music, **John Finney** in August 2023. Having served the Hills Church for over 39 incredible years, his vibrant and inspiring ministry of music enabled the congregation to experience a deeper connection to music and faith. John enriched our souls and enabled us to access a deeper level of liturgy throughout the church year. His Special Music Sundays were greatly anticipated. His ministry was celebrated by the commissioning and performance of a special anthem by Joel Martinson, "Unto the Hills." John will be sorely missed.

We sadly bid farewell, also, to **Rev. Anne Marie Holloway** as she leaves us to become the new Sole Minister at the Allin Congregational Church in Dedham. Her grace-filled ministry has been a blessing to our congregation for over five years. Her unmatched energy and enthusiasm helped shape and nurture the faith of children, youth, their extended families, and the wider church through education, service projects, worship leadership, and love.

Quoting Ecclesiastes 3:1, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...", **Rev. Judy Swahnberg** let us know that her ministry will become half-time as of the end of January 2024, and that after nearly fourteen years as our beloved Associate Minister, she will be retiring in June 2024. We are full of joy, gratitude and love for her ministry. Judy has supported grieving souls, counseled those with troubles, officiated at memorial services, weddings and baptisms, and inspired and led us in meditation and to think deeply and laugh in countless worship services. We are grateful for her long 38-year association with our church, and that she will be with us through the end of June 2024.

We are delighted to welcome our new Interim Associate Minister, **Rev. Katie Omberg**, who will begin with us on April 8. Her ministry will include a focus on children, youth and families, pastoral care, worship leadership, and administrative responsibilities. She has a deep commitment to fostering a relationship with God through worship, and sermons which address what the ancient word has to say to us and the world today. She is devoted to the spiritual care of all ages, including those who have been marginalized due to sexuality, economic conditions, or race.

In December, the Deacons approved the formation of a Search and Call Committee for a new full-time Settled

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2023 Annual Report

Associate Minister for Youth and Families. Serving on the committee are Rev. Jonathan Page, Susan Walton, Lynette Banks, Lori Janiuk, Steven Patrick, Kristin Der, Anna Thomas, and Clint Liebenberg. Working with both Rev. Page and Rev. Alex Shea Will of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC, the committee will be posting a new Local Church Profile and job description in January 2024.

We sincerely thank those Deacons who are rotating off of the Board in January 2024: Mimi D'Angelo, Katherine Edmonds, Steve Groff, Karen Gunn, Janeen Hansen, Jim Nicoletti, Pete Pedersen, and Brad Tomlinson.

Remembrances and Celebrations

Memorial services/teas and funeral services were conducted throughout the year, including for Maryanne "Burkey" Pratt, Mary Hill Canavan, Betsy Sechrest, Paul DePhillips, Elizabeth Robertson, and Shirley Marden.

Other Significant Events

- Welcomed 18 new members, with 17 children at home among them.
- Welcomed 7 new confirmands into membership.
- Held Lenten Taize Lenten Services, a reflective and contemplative form of prayer and singing.
- Welcomed Rev. Darrell Goodwin from the Southern New England Conference to preach on Martin Luther King weekend Sunday, followed by a Churchwide Day of Service. A Martin Luther King breakfast was held on Monday.
- Welcomed Rev. Noah Brewer-Wallin from the UCC Conference to speak on green congregations.
- Welcomed Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew to speak on stewardship and conference giving.
- Held a Lay-led Lenten Worship Service, which offered special music, hymns, and a reflection on the meaning of our faith in today's turbulent times, preceded by a communal meal. Jim McKinney preached.
- Distributed flowers from the Sunday worship service to those celebrating special occasions or suffering losses/illness, and delivered Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies.
- Celebrated confirmands with a May Confirmand Dinner and Confirmation Sunday in June.
- Merged the ministries of ushering and Deacon greeters.
- Hosted the choir Easter Sunday Brunch in April under the leadership of Marbo Hansen.
- Lovingly and continuously supported the work of Care Teams.
- Hosted Community Hours during months with five Sundays, and throughout the Summer.
- Formulated and approved a new church alcohol policy.

Board of Deacons Transitions

We wish to thank eight members of the 2023 Board of Deacons who will be retiring after the Annual Meeting: Mimi D'Angelo, Katherine Edmonds, Steve Groff, Karen Gunn, Janeen Hansen, Jim Nicoletti, Pete Pedersen, and Brad Tomlinson. George Corbett has agreed to serve another three-year term.

We look forward to 2024 with great anticipation of continuing to support the spiritual needs of the Hills congregation.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Groff and Barbara Farmer
Co-senior Deacons, 2023



2023 Annual Report

Care Team Ministry



Working closely with the ministers and the Spiritual Care Support Board (Board of Deacons), the Care Team continues to be a key resource in the life of the Hills Church, enhancing pastoral care within the congregation, and providing connection, encouragement and tangible support to individuals and families. The Care Teams blesses the Hills congregation with cards and calls, meals, and visits.

During this past year, dozens of church members participated in Care Team ministry. Saranel McGuirk continued as coordinator of care. Becky Lockwood, Saranel McGuirk, Mary Ellen Dinwoodey and Lori Januik, all former members of the Board of Deacons with broad knowledge of the congregation, continued as Care Team Captains. Their leadership is a blessing. Care Team Coordinator Saranel McGuirk also reaches out to with a special personal outreach ministry of notes and cards.

One of the graces of this ministry is that there are no monthly meetings. Instead, the ministry works through a web of interconnection among pastors, team leaders, care teams and deacons. Each week the pastors meet to review the known pastoral needs and suggest individuals for follow up pastoral care. (Alas, not all the family and individual needs of the parish are made known to the clergy team.)

The four Hills Church Care Teams rotate, serving approximately once per month. Using this model, any member of the week's scheduled team, as well as members of the Board of Deacons, may respond to the suggestions, depending on their inclination and availability. Care Team is structured to allow individuals to participate as the Spirit moves, more on some weeks than others. Members may also bow out of active participation at any time with our thanks.

The Care Teams are opportunities to reflect theologically about where God is being glimpsed in our midst, in our shared joys and sorrows. This aspect of shared ministry is an underlying grace. The Hills Church congregation continues to commit to this ministry and express gratitude for the Care Team. Once a year Care Team members are invited to be blessed during a worship service, and then enjoy a special luncheon as a way of saying thank you. New members are always welcome to join Care Team!

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Judy Swahnberg

2023 Annual Report

Director of Music Search Committee

Following the work of the Music Discernment Committee, which resulted in a report shared with the congregation in late 2022, a Search Committee was formed in early 2023 with the task of identifying a successor to John Finney, who was retiring in the Summer of 2023, after 39 years as Director of Music. The Committee looked for a very skilled and experienced organist, musician, choir director, and conductor, as well as a person of faith and with high character recommendations.

After an extensive search, we unanimously recommended to Reverend Jonathan Page that we hire Dr. William Cooper as our new Director of Music. After viewing video performances, evaluating resumes and reading recommendations, Dr. Cooper stood out in a field of 20 candidates from all over the country. His Zoom interview, his audition with the choir, and subsequent interviews reinforced our impression that he is a good fit for the Hills Church. We are thrilled that he accepted the position and began overseeing our music program, directing the choir, playing the organ, and helping to establish a youth/children's choir on August 22.

Garrett Murphy & Barbara Farmer, co-chairs
John Wimberly, honorary chair
Harriet Dishman
Kevin Groppe
Lucy O'Mara
Anna Spencer
Martha Stowell

2023 Annual Report

Interim Search Committee

On September 17, Rev. Anne Marie Holloway informed the congregation that she had accepted the call to serve as the next Minister of the Allin Congregational Church in Dedham. Along with the whole congregation, we celebrate Anne Marie's pursuit of her call from God, and we know the Allin Church will be lucky indeed to have her as their new minister.

At the Deacons meeting on October 3, an Interim Minister Search Committee was formed that included Mimi D'Angelo, Barbara Farmer, Jack Morgan, Laurie Otten, and Rev. Jonathan Page. That committee created an Interim Minister Profile and worked with the Southern New England Conference to advertise the position. After reviewing applications, we interviewed two different candidates and offered the position to Rev. Katie Omberg, who is now serving at the Interim Minister at the Congregational Church in Melrose Highlands. We were impressed with Katie's enthusiasm, her intelligence, and her experience and we feel she is the right fit to serve as the Interim Minister. Judy Swahnberg also interviewed Katie and affirmed the discernment of the committee.

Since Katie is finishing up her important work in Melrose, she will not be able to begin her interim work until April 8, 2024. In the meantime, Jonathan and Judy will cover the pastoral and ministerial duties of the church. Katie will serve until we find a replacement for Anne Marie and will then continue working at the Hills Church as we discern what to do to fill Judy's role after she retires in June 2024. It is the committee's recommendation that a Discernment Committee be established in April 2024 to help us decide what structure would be best for the Hills Church at this time. There will be plenty of opportunity for congregational input in that process.

The Interim Search Committee also took on the role of revising the Church Profile from the last ministerial search. We are grateful for the hard work of the previous Transition Committee, which has made our task immeasurably easier. The revised Profile will be reviewed by the Settled Search Committee and others before it is posted to the UCC job site in late January.

While it is always hard to say goodbye to such gifted clergy as Anne Marie and Judy, we are hopeful that the congregation will find the right candidates to lead us into the future.

With gratitude for your faith in us, we submit this report.

Mimi D'Angelo
Barbara Farmer
Jack Morgan
Laurie Otten
Rev. Jonathan Page

2023 Annual Report

Membership Ministry Team

In the past, membership was overseen by several people on the Spiritual Care Support Board (SCSB) working with the clergy. In 2021, Church Council created the Membership Ministry Team (MMT) which is supported by the SCSB, by combining members of that Board who are assigned to this team, with additional members of the clergy and the congregation. In 2023 the members of this ministry team included: P.-O. Davidsson*, Becky Epstein, Ted Garland*, Anne-Marie Holloway (co-chair), Sara Johnson*, Jonathan Page, Christopher Stowell (co-chair) and Myralee Wilson. (* From the SCSB.) We were substantially supported this year by Judy Swahnberg, Andrea Bellarosa and Noreen Young. The MMT's charges consist of:

- Outreach – inviting the community to our church and congregation
- On-boarding of new members – engaging visitors and prospective members, and transitioning them to membership
- Development of current members – enriching the lives of current members and helping them to find meaningful roles in our church community

In 2023 we carried out a number of projects addressing these charges including:

- At three Joining Sundays this year (1/8, 4/30 and 10/15) we welcomed 18 new adult members and their 16 minor children.
- We continued to track visitors and prospective members in a database we created last year. This helped us to reach out to this group of people in an organized manner.
- However, we have also developed a more comprehensive, several step process for moving visitors along to membership which involves multiple contacts with them by clergy and members of the MT. This process has been translated into a 'Pathway' in Realm (the new church operating software) which we think will be fully functional early in 2024. To that end:
 - all of the MMT members have been invited to establish their accounts;
 - we have updated the Realm database to include the prospective members we have been tracking;
 - we are planning to in-service MMT members on using the Realm Pathway to track prospective members in January.
- We revived the Ambassador Program whereby prospective and new members are paired with current members of the congregation for a year to give the former a church 'friend' who can help them meet people and find their niche in our community.
- We re-organized the new member information sessions and Joining Sunday itself, adding a new member breakfast and gift bags with books/flyers with information about the church, the cookbook, notecards, etc.
- Ted Garland has been photographing new and current members of the congregation for the directory, and uploading them into Realm.
- We completed a second review of the membership rolls in ACS (now Realm). Recall that we had extensively combed and edited the rolls last year resulting in a list of approximately 660 names.
- Along with the clergy, staff and Noreen Young, we helped plan publicity for this year's special events. We also did a mailing of the Easter events card to recent real estate purchasers in Wellesley and the adjacent zip codes.
- We arranged for an article about Jonathan Page's arrival to appear in the *Wellesley/Weston* magazine.
- We organized the recognition of long-term members at the Annual Meeting last year and will do so for this year.

2023 Annual Report

In February we will review and update our list of projects and prioritize them for 2024. First on the list will be completing the implementation of the Pathways.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Stowell
Co-Chair, Membership Ministry Team



2023 Annual Report

Director of Music Report

John Finney, retired (January through July 2023)

Having announced in March 2022 that I would be retiring in the summer of 2023 (after 39 years as Director of Music for the Hills Church), I knew that 2023 would include not only significant accomplishments, but also numerous transitions and exciting changes.

Here are some of the events from the first half of 2023 at the Hills Church that I would like to highlight:

- In January 2023, I was thrilled, along with the Staff and Congregation of the Hills Church, to welcome Rev. Jonathan Page as our new Senior Minister! It was a supreme joy for me to work with him during my last year at the Hills Church.
- The season of Lent was enhanced by a series of Wednesday evening services in Wallace Chapel, featuring music from the Taizé tradition. I am grateful to Lucy O'Mara, Barbara Farmer, Laurie Otten, and others for volunteering to lead the music for these deeply moving services.
- Our Chancel Choir and soloists were joined by a chamber orchestra to present Ola Gjeilo's sublime and evocative "Sunrise Mass" as our Special Music on Sunday morning, March 19. This was an event of great significance, as it was the culmination of many months of rehearsals which began in January 2020. We had originally planned to present the "Sunrise Mass" in March 2020, but that presentation had to be postponed due to the onset of the pandemic. What a thrill it was for all of us to finally present this beautiful music to the Hills Church in 2023!
- Easter 2023 was a glorious event! Our Chancel Choir and Hills Bells were once again joined by the Gainsborough Brass Ensemble in presenting splendid music. One of our anthems was Joel Martinson's "Alleluia! Heart and Voice to Heaven Raise," which had been commissioned by the Hills Church in 2009 in honor of my 25th anniversary as Director of Music.
- I was honored to work with our Chancel Choir and guest soloist Shelby Condray to provide the music for the magnificent Service of Installation for Rev. Jonathan Page as Senior Minister on April 23.
- The weekend of June 17-18 will forever be one of the most memorable weekends of my entire life, as the Hills Church created an extravagant series of events in honor of my retirement after 39 years as Director of Music. A gala banquet on Saturday evening (orchestrated by Marbo Hansen and a host of volunteers) included sumptuous decor and food, as well as heartfelt tributes and delightful musical offerings. The service on Sunday morning June 18 included the world-premieres of two musical compositions that had been commissioned in my honor: "Noël," by Fred Gramann (largely based on Daquin's "Noël X," my traditional Christmas Eve postlude), played brilliantly by The Hills Bells, conducted by Martha Stowell; and "I Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills" by Joel Martinson, sung exquisitely by our Chancel Choir and accompanied on the organ by my spouse and former Hills Church Director of Music James David Christie (who graciously stepped in to play for our services during the six weeks when I was recovering from surgeries for two detached retinas and couldn't see well enough to play). Following Rev. Jonathan Page's eloquent sermon on the power of music, I was called forth for a special blessing and laying-on of hands by our three ministers (Rev. Page, Rev. Judy Swahnberg, and Rev. Anne Marie Holloway). Later in the service, Laurie Otten (Church Moderator and longtime Soprano Soloist) presented me with extraordinarily generous gifts from the Hills Church.

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I will never be able to adequately thank Barbara Farmer for all she did in June and July 2023, when it became apparent to me that I needed an immense amount of help because my vision was still impaired as I continued to recover from the surgeries (in May 2023) for two detached retinas. Barbara not only organized a team of volunteers from the Chancel Choir to do a thorough cleanup and reorganization of the Choir Room, but also accomplished a complete revamping of the database to catalog the entire choral library of the Hills Church (over 400 compositions). She created and implemented a filing and labeling system for our choral music that I had dreamed of for years but had never been able to accomplish on my own. Thank you, Barbara!

- On Sunday morning, July 30, I played my last service as Director of Music! Towards the end of that memorable service, Rev. Jonathan Page invited the congregation and choir to surround me, and we all sang “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds,” creating yet another unforgettable connection with my beloved Hills Church.

I want to express my deepest thanks to our soloists (Laurie Stewart Otten, soprano; Shannon Lebrón, mezzo-soprano; Michael Calmés, tenor; and Garrett Murphy, baritone; along with frequent guest soloist Stephen Lebrón, baritone) for their fine work in presenting beautiful solos and for serving as inspiring Section Leaders for our Chancel Choir. Both Shannon and Garrett will be leaving the Hills Church at the end of 2023; oh, how they will be missed!

A special word of thanks to Emily Gauthier for her excellent work in bringing the joy of singing to our children each Sunday!

I extend my heartfelt thanks and boundless admiration to Martha Stowell for her volunteer work as Founder and Director of The Hills Bells. Martha continues to seek out beautiful and engaging music for bells, and to inspire and lead the members of The Hills Bells in ways that foster deep connection and commitment.

And I am deeply grateful to all the members of the Chancel Choir and of The Hills Bells, who volunteer their time so graciously to attend rehearsals and services each week, and who donate their musical talent so generously to enhance our worship services.

It has been an immense joy to work with our phenomenal Hills Church Staff, including Office Administrator Andrea Bellarosa, Financial Officer John Dooley, and Children’s Ministry Director Sally Tomasetti. And I will forever be grateful to our ministers Rev. Jonathan Page, Rev. Judy Swahnberg, and Rev. Anne Marie Holloway for being not only supportive and compassionate colleagues, but also inspiring spiritual leaders.

The Music Discernment Committee had been created in 2022, charged with examining the role of music at the Hills Church, surveying the congregation for their input, and making recommendations on the next steps toward finding a new Director of Music. To follow up on the excellent work of the Music Discernment Committee, the Director of Music Search Committee was created early in 2023, and was co-chaired by Barbara Farmer and Garrett Murphy. The prayerful and meticulous work of this committee resulted in the hiring of Dr. William (Will) Cooper, to succeed me in August 2023 as Director of Music for the Hills Church, and it brought me great peace to know that the music programs of the Hills Church would be in the gifted hands of such a remarkable musician as Will Cooper.

The Hills Church is richly blessed! And I feel especially blessed to have worked here for 39 years!

Submitted by John Finney

2023 Annual Report

Director of Music Report
Will Cooper (August through December 2023)

It was a great joy for me to join the Hills Church as Music Director in August. I felt called by God to serve here, and am blessed to lead music at such a warm and welcoming church that has such a great tradition of music in worship. I am grateful to the members of the search committee for their support, and to John Finney, who has been tremendously helpful during the transition. Here are some highlights from the second half of 2023:

- Sunday, August 27 marked my first Sunday at the Hills Church.
- On Sunday, September 3, we presented Bach's Cantata BWV 82, Ich habe genug in its entirety with bass soloist Garrett Murphy and oboist Jennifer Slowik.
- On October 1, we were joined by violinist, Jiyu Oh, who performed two of my chorale preludes and a new arrangement of Great Is Thy Faithfulness with bass soloist Garrett Murphy.
- On October 15, we were joined by violist Joan Ellersick, who performed three of my chorale preludes and played on the hymns as well.
- On November 5, the Hills Bells played a festive prelude. We were also joined by three students from the Walnut Hill School, Jessica Kartawidjaja, Daniel Ma and James Palmer, who accompanied the Chancel Choir on the Introit from Faure's Requiem. Sara Johnson offered a beautiful flute solo during Communion that Sunday.
- In early November, we relaunched our children's choirs at the Hills Church. The Cherub Choir (Pre-K through 2nd grade) is led by Emily Gauthier, and meets after church on Sundays. The Children's Choir (3rd grade through 8th grade) is led by myself, and meets Wednesday afternoons from 4:30-5:15.
- On December 3, the Hills Bells kicked off Advent with Gramann's Ring Change Prelude on Divinum Mysterium.
- On December 10, the Chancel Choir was joined by a period orchestra to present Händel's Dixit Dominus. This was the culmination of months of hard work. We started rehearsing in late September, and added additional sectional rehearsals. Dixit Dominus is considered to be Händel's most challenging choral work, and I am so proud of the Chancel Choir and our soloists who tackled the challenge, and did an extraordinary job. It was also a bittersweet day, as we honored our wonderful longtime soloists Shannon Lebrón and Garrett Murphy, both of whom are stepping down from their positions at the end of 2023.
- On December 13, we presented our annual Seniors Christmas Concert. It was a joy to have both Laurie Otten and Michael Calmes singing for this special event, which was followed by a lovely luncheon.
- December 16 was the date of our annual Christmas Concert, which featured the Hills Bells, the Chancel Choir, our soloists, as well as the Children's Choir and Cherub Choir. It was wonderful to hear all of our musical ensembles on the same program.
- On December 17, we celebrated the Third Sunday of Advent with brass and bells, while we also said farewell and honored our beloved Rev. Anne Marie Holloway. We sang two special arrangements of Christmas carols with the Chancel Choir, brass, the Hills Bells and the congregation.
- On Christmas Eve, the combined Children's Choirs sang at the 3:30 pageant. The Chancel Choir sang at the 6pm and 10pm services. We heard beautiful solos by each of our soloists, Laurie Stewart Otten, Shannon Lebrón, Michael Calmés and Garrett Murphy. We were also joined by hornist Daniel Ma for the service.
- A central part of my ministry as a church musician is the composition of new music. This fall, I composed instrumental hymn arrangements for All Saints Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, and Christmas Eve, several descants, an orchestral prelude for period instruments on Es ist ein Ros entsprungen, and a Christmas Brass Medley written in honor of Rev. Anne Marie Holloway.

I am so thankful to our soloists, Laurie Stewart Otten, Shannon Lebrón, Michael Calmés and Garrett Murphy, who provided so many beautiful musical offerings and faithfully led their sections of the choir. Shannon and

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Garrett will be sorely missed, but they have each assured me they will be back to sing with us from time to time. I also would like to thank Stephen Lebrón, who regularly served as our substitute bass soloist. I am deeply grateful to Emily Gauthier, who did wonderful work with the Cherub Choir this fall. I also wish to thank Martha Stowell and the Hills Bells for the beauty and artistry they provide at so many of our services. I appreciate each and every member of the Chancel Choir, for their hard work, wonderful singing and dedication to the group. I am thankful to all the members of the Children's and Cherub Choirs, and their parents, who committed to making joyful music together this fall. I would especially like to thank Barbara Farmer for her work in our choir room, as well as volunteering her time to sit in on numerous Children's Choir rehearsals. I am grateful to Harriet Dishman, who helps to organize our choir robes. I would also like to thank my wife, Eun Young Lee, for accompanying the children's choirs, and filling in as guest conductor of the Hills Bells during Christmas. It is a privilege to work alongside such wonderful colleagues as Andrea Bellarosa, John Dooley and Sally Tomasetti, and I so appreciate the leadership and support of Rev. Jonathan Page, Rev. Judy Swahnberg and Rev. Anne Marie Holloway.

Submitted by Will Cooper, Director of Music



2023 Annual Report

Parish Life Ministry Team

Mission:

The Parish Life Ministry Team is dedicated to providing social activities for church families and supporters. In keeping with the church's vision, we host family-oriented functions. It is our hope that members will worship in church among friends, not strangers. We want the youngest to the oldest among us to feel God's love through relationships with church members of all ages.

2023 Accomplishments:

First, we welcomed Cindy Lowe to our team.

It is with great joy that Parish Life (AKA The Party Committee) has sponsored many Community Hours, a Pride Picnic, Rally Day ice cream social, helped celebrate the success of the Pumpkin Patch, and hosted a mocktail party. An upcoming event we will participate in is the good-bye celebration for our beloved Associate Minister, Anne Marie Holloway

We continue to partner with Children's Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Deacons in bringing social events for those of all ages to our church family.

Hopes for 2024:

It is our hope that we can continue to provide a variety of food-centered opportunities for church members of all ages to come together to laugh, to make new friends, and to feel God's presence in our midst.

We also hope to have some of our youth join our ministry team so we can be representative of the entire congregation.

Members:

Rob Andrews, Dana Brennan, Paul Bruchez, Mimi D'Angelo, Mary Ellen Dinwoodey, Lori Janiuk, Debbie Karlson, Cindy Lowe, and David Otten have had the pleasure of friendship.

Respectfully submitted,

Mimi D'Angelo, Co-Chair



2023 Annual Report

Seniors Ministry Team

The Seniors Ministry Team, guided by Rev. Judy Swahnberg, works in a variety of ways to reinforce the connections of our older church members to the church community and to address both individual needs and common issues. The definition of “seniors” is a moving target, and it is a period in life that itself goes through a series of stages, from signing up for Medicare to retirement to perhaps moving or downsizing, as well as facing health issues and mourning losses. As the saying goes, old age is not for sissies, but we have found that we all fare better when we can share our experiences and both learn from and support each other.

Seniors Ministry Team activities for 2023 fall into two categories.

First, on-going communication with our seniors, in the form of notes, phone calls, birthday cards.

Second, special programs or activities for older seniors, younger seniors, and almost seniors. These included:

- A “Welcome Tea” for new senior minister Jonathan Page
- Sending Valentine cards
- Spring presentation by our sound tech Steven Hopkins about using various forms of technology
- Fall “Apple Fest” with cider and apple cake, and a discussion of “How Parenting Changes When Children Become Adults.”
- Sending Advent calendars as a holiday greeting from the church family and a way to observe the season Christmas Concert, with our new music director Will Cooper, our soprano soloist Laurie Stewart Otten, and our tenor soloist Michael Calmés. This event provides a lovely interlude of music, reflection, and celebration in what can sometimes be a harried season. After a Covid-imposed hiatus, we again held a festive luncheon after the concert to share fellowship, good food, and special holiday desserts.

Many thanks to Judy Swahnberg and the members of the Seniors Ministry Team – Wendy Baker, Becky Epstein, Alice Mullen, and Tina Vasconcelles. Thanks also to Kelly Ford for her help with the Christmas luncheon and to Saranel McGuirk for her greeting card ministry.

Susan Walton and Lucy Sur, co-chairs



2023 Annual Report

Ushering Report

It is with gratitude to those who previously led the Ushering Ministry Team and to those experienced ushers who show up Sunday after Sunday that Ruth Persson and Anna Spencer Armstrong took on organizing and recruiting Ushers for this new year.

The primary duty of the ushers is to welcome people into church each Sunday. We do this by providing orders of worships, orienting people to the worship service and the building, and by simply greeting people as they come in. We let families know that little wigglers are welcome in the service and that there is an option for drop-off child care on the third floor. For families uncomfortable dropping their kids off, there is comfortable space for them in the Board Room where the service can still be heard. We ensure that hearing aids get passed out and that walkers get stored safely away at the beginning of the service and are returned to their owners at the end. Finally, we ensure that the sanctuary is reset at the end of the service so it is ready to receive people again the next week.

The secondary duties include managing the collection of offerings, count attendance and collecting the fellowship pads.

Throughout last winter and spring, the Ushering Ministry Team provided 2-4 people per Sunday. For higher volume Sundays such as Easter the team recruited up to 6 ushers. During the summer months the Deacons graciously completed all ushering duties. We thank the Deacons for this service and for their continuing support throughout the rest of the year!

This fall we found that larger numbers of people joining each Sunday has required a minimum of 4 people to efficiently collect the offering. In anticipation of the time when 6 or even 8 might suddenly be required, we have several ushers who have volunteered to be called upon in the midst of a service should it be decided that more people would be needed to complete the collection in the allotted time.

So far this fall we have had 24 different people sign up for ushering including several first-time ushers. Experienced ushers offer day-of training to new ushers to make volunteering as easy and stressless as possible. We continue to recruit new volunteers and welcome all to this vital ministry.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Spencer-Armstrong & Ruth Persson

2023 Annual Report Community Hour Ministry Team

During the past year community hour at the Hills Church transitioned from a post pandemic version with all packaged drinks and snacks to a more traditional version with coffee, tea, juice, fruit, cookies, and cut up goodies. Many of the efficiencies developed during the pandemic have been retained including serving coffee and tea in thermal carafes with pump dispensers and some packaged items for those on the go. The thermal carafes keep the drinks hotter and also allow the guests to serve themselves.

As in the past, community hour was used for a number of celebrations. The year started off with a welcome for Jonathan on January 8th and ended with a party for Anne Marie on December 17th. In between we celebrated Confirmation Sunday, the All Church Picnic, Rally Day, and the pumpkin patch. We even celebrated ourselves with a Retro Community Hour.

Staffing for community hour is organized with a SignUpGenius and the watchful eye of Mimi D'Angelo and yours truly. Since the summer Parish Life has taken responsibility for the first Sunday of every month and the Deacons handle the 5th Sunday if there is one. The Deacons also take care of community hour during July and August to give the ministry team a break.

The Community Hour Ministry Team members are Karen Gunn, Susan Walton, Lucy Sur, Jeff Thomas, Kristen Toffer, Cindy Lowe, Mimi D'Angelo, and David Otten. Mimi and David function as co-chairs.

Respectfully submitted,

David Otten

2023 Annual Report

Welcoming Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force

WHCC voted on June 5, 2011, to accept the following ONA Welcome Statement:

The Hills Church affirms God's embrace of every individual and strives to follow Jesus' commandment to love one another. Enriched by diversity, we welcome people of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, culture, and family configuration to share in the full life and ministry of the church.

Our current Task Force was formed by the Deacons in 2021 to find expressions of welcome to the LGBTQ+ community as we celebrated a decade of being an Open and Affirming church (ONA).

The original purpose of the ONA Task Force, giving a visual expression to what the WHCC Congregation ratified over a decade ago, has been met.

- We approved purchase by the Spiritual Care Support Board (Deacons) of four multicolored Adirondack-style chairs.
- We approved the display of a banner on the exterior wall of Wallace Chapel and flags along the front walkway.
- We have discovered upon close inspection that the sign on the front lawn is rotting, in disrepair, and needs replacement. If the sign on the front lawn is replaced, the Task Force recommends that a rainbow strip is added as a sign of welcome to the LGBTQ+ community.

With these things accomplished, the ONA group is now working toward continuing the discussion of living out our commitment to this community by determining the role of the Hills Church in the ever-evolving LGBTQ discussion.

Values that guide us:

Provide safety for the LGBTQ community

- Create a space where people are all welcome; No judging: for it not to be a "big deal" who we are; we are all Christians
- Understand that the urgency of this work is clear. We have children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friends who are suffering.
- Love is at the center of our ministry to share the joy of church life with all.

Mission:

The Wellesley Hills Congregational Church (the "Hills Church") will seek to ensure a safe and engaging environment for all LGBTQ+ individuals, inclusive of gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and gender-nonconforming people of all ages. The Hills Church strives to promote awareness of the Hills Church's open and affirming (ONA) policy by creating positive impact within its sanctuary and for the entire community through education, advocacy, discussion, and any other appropriate means. The Hills Church believes that love is at the center of our ministry, and we want to share the joy of church life with all.

In 2023, The Welcoming ONA/Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force only met twice. Most members of this group were also on the Racial Justice Working Group and that's where we focused our attention as the ONA group had accomplished its original goals. In addition, two members needed to step down, and our beloved Mary Hill Canavan died.

We are in the process of reinvigorating this group and carrying on with further plans in 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Mimi D'Angelo

2023 Annual Report

Women's Ministry

Last year we reported that we had paused activities to discern what "Women's Ministry" would look like in the future. In the midst of our pause, Katie McCabe offered to chair a Rummage Sale, so we were delighted to be able to host the sale once again last spring.

Katie McCabe, Donna McCabe and Monica Garfield went to work and pulled together a Rummage Sale that was successful not only in the amount raised, but in offering an opportunity for church members to work together and to reconnect after the years of isolation. The sale raised about \$8000 which will be disbursed to outreach programs that provide services to women and children. Past years, recipients have included such charities as Honduras Hope and Help Kids India.

A new group began in October, Needlework for All, led by Bev St. Clair. Their mission: to welcome all interested in needlework of all types, at any skill level. The group aims to teach and learn together, through knitting, crocheting, and all sorts of handwork for all sorts of projects: personal, for church endeavors, and for other organizations. The group meets monthly in person – see their announcements in Events in the Hills!

Knitters have continued to provide prayer shawls for members who need care and comfort, baptismal blankets for babies newly baptized, and graduation scarves for high school graduates. This year we were able to gift a graduation scarf to Rev. Anne Marie Holloway to remind her of the ongoing love of the Hills Church as she steps into her new role at the Allin Congregational Church in Dedham.

As important as the funds raised and the shawls and blankets knitted has been the fellowship enjoyed as we worked and served together. We look forward to providing more opportunities for women to work, pray, and laugh together!

Laurie Otten



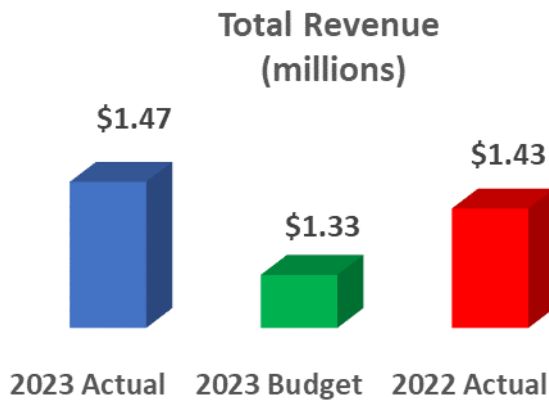
2023 Annual Report

Stewards Support Board
Development Team & Stewardship Campaign

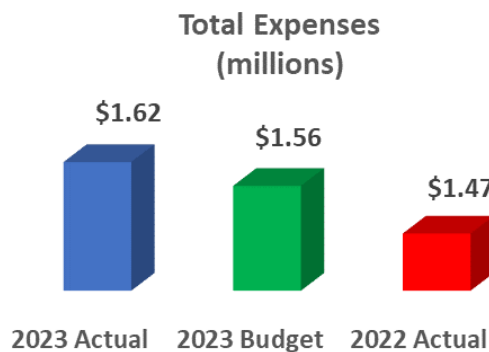
Operating Results

Our 2023 operating results and the proposed 2024 budget are among the documents in the financial hand-out that is being circulated as a part of the 2024 Annual Meeting. As in prior years, the draft 2023 internal financial statements are available in electronic form from our church administrator.

In 2023, our combined annual revenues were \$1.47 million versus a budget of \$1.33 million. Annual stewardship receipts and gifts for 2023 of \$852 thousand were \$40 thousand unfavorable to budget while Nursery School revenues of \$910 thousand exceeded budget expectations by \$92 thousand as student enrollment was at capacity. Overall, the Nursery School contributed income, net of expenses of \$417 thousand in 2023 exceeding budget expectations by approximately \$50 thousand, augmented by unplanned grants from the State of Massachusetts as well as better than expected enrollment. In addition to the above, the church received other income of \$169 thousand comprised primarily of monies received from the Christmas and Easter offerings, net proceeds from the Pumpkin Patch, as well as gifts received at the installation service of our new Senior Minister.



Total expenses for 2023 of \$1.62 million were slightly unfavorable to budget by \$68 thousand due primarily to higher Office and Property expenses which included costs related to technology upgrades as well as a number of repairs to the property which were incurred throughout the year. In addition, we saw higher than planned Youth expenses related to unplanned costs supporting the youth service trip in May of 2023. These increases were partially offset by lower Human Resource costs due to the departure of our finance associate and our part-time sexton during the middle of the year as well as the timing of Christian Service Support Board spending.



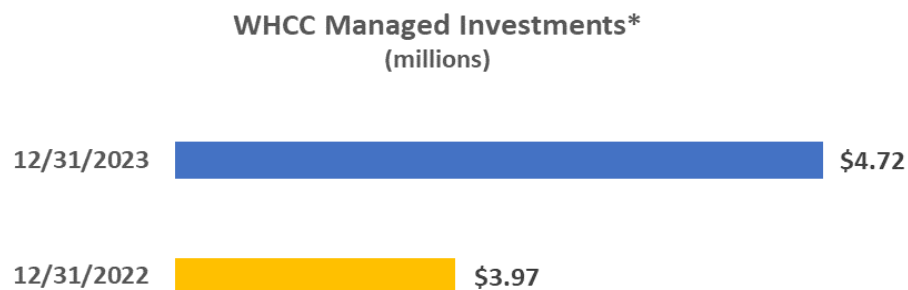
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Investment Results

Our principal investment account at Charles Schwab, which is professionally managed by Birch Hill, had total account and equity investment returns of approximately 13.8% and 20.6% respectively while the Standard & Poors 500 Index returned 26.3% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average returned 16.2%. This resulted in an endowment balance at the end of 2023 of \$4.72 million as compared to a balance of \$3.97 million in the same period a year ago.

Our current investment return target remains a real return (inflation adjusted) of at least 4% annual average total growth. In parallel, our spending policy contemplates that annually we will use 4% of the annual three-year year-end average balance for operations. We made no draws on the endowment in 2021, 2022 or 2023.

2024 Budget



*Managed by Birch Hill Investment Advisors

The 2024 Budget plans for total revenues of \$1.39 million with a Nursery School occupancy rate to once again be at or very near capacity. At the end of December, Stewardship pledges for 2023 were approximately \$770 thousand, ahead of last year and pledge units were up just under 10%. Efforts to increase stewardship are on-going. Should it be needed, the budgeted draw from our endowment for Church operations will be approximately \$161 thousand in 2024.

Some parts of the endowment are restricted and are most often targeting particular uses, either by the donors or by the pertinent church board. For example, in 2023, we once again expect to draw amounts from the J. David and Virginia Wimberly Fund for Music Ministry to help defray the annual compensation costs for our Director of Music and other music related expenses. The spending from these temporarily restricted funds is consistent with prior years and are unrelated to the planned endowment draw previously mentioned. Consistent with past practice, we wish to maintain and hopefully grow the endowment to support the Church's annual operations on a continuing basis.

Total expenses in 2024 are expected to generally be in-line with 2023 spending, driven by decreases in Human Resource costs due to the future construct of the clergy and related compensation as well as a decrease in Youth related expenses, there being no service trip planned for 2024. Partially offsetting these decreases are additional Property expenses related to anticipated repairs and minor increases from various service providers as well as an expectation that Christian Service Support Board spending will return to historical levels.

As a result of all of these factors, we once again expect to have a challenging but manageable operating deficit in 2024.

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2023 Annual Report

Formation of a Development Ministry Team

Acting on recommendations of the Resource Requirement Committee which assessed the need for increased financial support for the Church, a Development Ministry Team was formed this summer. The Team is charged with coordinating and advising all fundraising efforts of the Hills Church including the annual stewardship campaign, future capital campaigns, and the establishment of the 1847 Legacy Circle. The latter will encourage legacy contributions to the Church as well as provide recognition for our members who have included the Church in their estate plans. The Team will also seek ways to re-activate members who have made annual pledges but no longer pledge. Moreover, the Team will develop and implement strategies to raise major gifts inspired by meaningful events in the life of our Church and/or with particular spiritual significance to individuals.

Members of the Development Ministry Team are Wendy Baker, Becky Epstein, David Ingram, Bob Minetti, Jonathan Page, Steven Patrick, Susan Walton, and Andy Wilson.

Finally, I want to thank our Treasurer, Nancy Simons, Assistant Treasurer, Nana Poku, as well as all of the members of the Stewards Support Board, including Jeff Dodge, Caitlin Baron, Alex Kolb, Susan Loveland, Rich Howe, Al Persson, Phil Laughlin and Garrett Murphy. It is a pleasure to work with such a talented and committed group.

Many thanks as well to John Dooley who has been helpful throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,
Andy Wilson, Chair

2023 Annual Report

Livestream Ministry and the Hills Church

Since July 2021, the church services have been coming live to your living rooms, your vacation spots, your phones, and all over the world. Over 200 videos have now been produced and are available on Youtube! And you can watch the replay any time, anywhere, and at your own convenience. This is the Hills Church Livestream.

Our Goals

Our goal with the livestream has been multi-fold:

1. Enable members and friends who cannot always make it to church for health reasons or travel or other conflicts the opportunity to keep up with the Hills Church community.
2. Provide people searching for a local church a chance to experience our community and hopefully decide to come visit us.
3. For special events, like funerals, weddings, or special music services, provide a way for people who cannot attend a chance to see the event, and it can become a cherished remembrance that can be replayed.

Provide a new way to reach out to others outside our direct community with messages of hope, love, faith, joy, and inclusion.

Success Stories

Some stories we have heard from our viewers have been very meaningful. One member who spends winters in the south introduced her sister to our church through livestream, and her sister is now watching our livestream regularly. Another member often visits his mother in elderly housing on Sundays, and they watch the service together. Others who have conflicts with kid sports and other activities have been grateful to have a way to watch the service later on in the day. Another was out of the country when a friend passed away, and was very grateful to be able to watch the memorial service on the livestream. And others have joined the church after first viewing the church on livestream.

We typically have 20-45 households tuned in live during the service, and 100-150 or more that tune into the service during the following week. Additionally, our minister sermons have their own playlist grouping, and they have gotten many additional views on their own. We also now have 300+ subscribers to our Youtube channel, a major milestone in Youtube participation which gives us more presence on the Youtube site.



Livestream Ministry and the Hills Church

Since July 2021, the church services have been coming live to your living rooms, your vacation spots, your phones, and all over the world. Over 200 videos have now been produced and are available on Youtube! And you can watch the replay any time, anywhere, and at your own convenience. This is the Hills Church Livestream.

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2023 Annual Report

Getting Better all the Time

Over time, our livestream group has been perfecting their techniques to present a quality video of each service and event. We still have occasional issues and we can't go back or cover up mistakes in presentation of a livestream, but we have been able to reliably produce a livestream every Sunday (except one or two when the Internet connection failed). We are also grateful for criticisms, or suggestions for improvement. For example, we now include "Upcoming Events" in the lead-in as a result of several viewer suggestions.

Over the next year we will be reviewing our sound system to replace some aging technology. We will be fixing a problem we have with network isolation, and possibly bring some real-time video to more locations in the church. And we hope to provide easier mechanisms for people to search for music and sermons through our livestream collection.

You can Participate!

One of our major goals has always been to simplify the process of recording a service, so that it can be done by a single person with a minimal amount of training. So if you would like to help out, we are happy to let you learn!

Most important is a desire to learn video technology and to recognize that through livestream God has given us a means of supporting our church community even when they cannot be here in person.

Thank You!

We have been grateful for the support of our ministers, our church administrator, our music director and staff, choir, and Bells, and our lay leadership in the church council and support boards, and the whole church. This has been, and continues to be a group effort to produce the content. This includes all of you who are there in the church on Sunday. Thank you!

Faithfully,

Bill Spencer
Rob Andrews
Ted Garland
Steven Hopkins
Kenny Goshgarian

2023 Annual Report

Faith Formation Support Board (FFSB)

The Faith Formation Support Board (FFSB) oversees and nurtures the deepening and strengthening of faith for children, youth, and adults through a range of spiritual experiences and practices, activities, and traditional Christian education, both within the congregation and extending outward to our local neighbors and the world.

The Board met monthly this year, primarily by Zoom, though the most recent meeting was in person in the Chapel, sharing a potluck meal. At the beginning of the year Jonathan shared his vision of small group ministries which had been instrumental in creating community at his church in Houston. He recommended a book named *Activate* by Nelson Searcy which was distributed and discussed by the board during the next several meetings. As an initial step at creating small groups, Summer Suppers were organized as a way of keeping parishioners in touch over the summer. They were well received and the last one, hosted by Jonathan at the parsonage, attracted over 100 people.

Over the summer a series of small group offerings for the fall were developed. The leaders for the groups included, members of the church, clergy, and staff. A brochure was created, and members of the congregation were invited to sign up in September with most groups meeting during October and November. The program was very well received.

Small Groups Offerings for Fall 2023

- Meditation with Rev. Judy Swahnberg
- Justice League for Youth
- Jesus and the Disinherited
- Body and Spirituality
- Confirmation for Adults
- Paul's Letter to the Galatians
- Christianity and Contemporary America
- Men's Breakfast
- Parents of Littles
- Make This Bread – Parents with Kids

In March long time Hills Church member and co-chair of the FFSB, Mary Hill Canavan, passed away. She was the spiritual anchor of the board and her passing was a serious loss.

At the end of December the ministerial liaison for the board, Rev. Anne Marie Holloway, left the Hills Church to become the Sole Minister of the Allin Congregational Church in Dedham. Anne Marie resurrected the FFSB when she first came to the Hills Church and all of us on the board have known only her as our advisor. We will all miss her dearly!

We wish to thank the following members of this year's Faith Formation Support Board for their devotion and energy to this ministry: Shannon Smith, Dana Brennan, Neely Dodge, Anne Leland, David Otten, and Church Council Liaison Kristen Toffer.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway
Co-Chairs David Otten and Mary Hill Canavan



2023 Annual Report

Children's Ministry

Holy Chaos = Beautiful Faith Formation

"If I write for anything, it's to bring order out of chaos, but not too much. A wee bit of disorder never did any harm." — Kathleen Jamie

Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie wasn't thinking about the Holy Spirit or Children's Ministry when she spoke the words above, but she reminds me of two important points about that Wild Spirit whose presence is ever with us. First, whenever the Advocate's in the room, there's likely to be some chaos there, too. And secondly, a little bit of Holy Chaos is actually quite a good thing, especially when it includes the faith formation of all God's children.

Understanding Jesus is the light of the world when carrying that light during a Worship service. "I'm holding REAL light," exclaimed a three-year-old sharing this proud moment with their parents; this is Holy grace-filled chaos. Beautiful faith formation.

A seven-year-old, dressed in a mock minister robe, re-enacted a baptism perfectly, Word for Word, memorized by watching Baptisms during the Worship service. Holy chaos equals beautiful faith formation. God's faithful and generous people open themselves to experiencing the Holy Spirit in new and fresh ways as the Spirit guides our children with their wiggles and giggles to feel at home in the sanctuary and on the third floor. Every squirm and peep reminds us that they are God's gracious gift. So I thank you, church, for this gift; it's beautiful faith formation.

Talking of Beautiful faith formation, we wish Rev. Anne Marie all the best in her new church journey. While we will miss her presence, the lessons learned and wisdom gained from her mentorship will continue to be evident in church school. We are grateful for our partnership and inspiration. The children love you!

Some of our greatest moments are when we serve and play together! Here are my favorite program moments of 22/23:

MLK Service Stations: There were many stations on MLK's day of service. We made Valentine's cards. We built six bureaus for New Life Furniture Bank. We made art for the Church School and bird feeders for birds. Blankets for children and donated children's books for two African libraries. The children love this day and feel proud they can help others in so many ways.



Egg Hunt: It was the usual crazy, busy, fun time with the bunny. Made extra fun with all the helpers this year. Thank you, church, for coming out and being the smiling face of the church. We were sold out; that's over 400 people!

Sedar meal: We enjoyed learning about the traditional Sedar meal and Passover; following each step, the children were not fans of the bitter herbs.

Unity Farm Visit: A small group of farm explorers visited the local farm sanctuary for education and service work. We learned all about helping animals, and then we got to feed them. I encourage you to visit if you haven't yet. Such fun!



Harvest Gratitude Festival: We had a bounce house, face painting, and gourd monster-making! Many families attended church, and all was gourdous!

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2023 Annual Report

Advent Gingerbread House Workshop Event: 60 Houses beautifully decorated from snow-covered roofs, working lights, and frozen duck ponds; I am always amazed at the creativity.

An excellent Talent show: What talent there is at the Hills Church! We had a magician, two pianists, a recorder performance, a comedian, a gymnast, a cheerleader, solo performances, joke tellers, quizmasters, and a Whistle choir. Wow!



I love Santa!: Santa visited and listened to many children's wishes. I am always thankful to my helpers with this event. It would never happen if Santa's secret elves didn't work hard to make it do so. Wink, wink! You know who you are.

Christmas Pageant: Our Christmas pageant was successful. It was such a heartwarming presentation that everyone felt overwhelming joy during and after service. I am most proud of our Sunday school children, who were awesome!

Cherub Choir: Their performances at the Christmas Concert and Christmas Eve were everything we had hoped for. We are so thankful to Ms. Emily and Will Cooper for working so hard with our children and giving them the gift of song.

Also, this year, the **Wonder Library** was built on the third floor. A new space open for all to read and study our faith. All the books are age-appropriate faith-based reading. The kids have really enjoyed this space so far.



We served others:

- ◆ Assembled 16 food bags for children at the Chittick School.
- ◆ Made Christmas cards for the Christmas Gift families.
- ◆ Decorated the church for Easter Sunday with watercolor Butterflies.
- ◆ Served on the Pumpkin Patch and built a Pumpkin Castle for visitors to play in.
- ◆

In the program year 2023/24, we look forward to providing families service and fellowship opportunities that encourage a sense of belonging to our church community and increase intergenerational participation in outreach.

You can feel the happiness in the air during each Sunday school activity. The children are comfortable with each other and continue to build strong relationships. Our parents, teachers, and volunteers are kind, patient, and always supportive. Church School is growing. And with that growth, more teachers are needed. That is why I am so grateful for Emily Gauthier, who continues to bring joyful noise to the Church School each Sunday. The children love to sing the songs of our faith. Also, Elise Malenkamp joined us this year and is a

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2023 Annual Report

constant presence for our little ones. Emily and Elise are joyful, kind, and great leaders in our church. We are blessed to have their guidance in creating many beautiful church formation moments. As we continue to grow, we will look again to the congregation for volunteers; this is an exciting opportunity!

Children at Hills Church are beloved, and we are grateful our families continue to show up with dedication and joy!

With blessings and gratitude,

Sally Tomasetti
Director of Children's Ministry



2023 Annual Report

Morning Meditation

Walking Together as We Practice our Faith

*Come as you are able, just as you are;
in the stillness, in the quiet, to find and be transformed by God around us and within us.*

Tuesday Morning Meditation has provided a group of church members with an opportunity to step aside from the busyness and challenges of our days and pause for an hour to explore the spiritual practice of meditation; to experience how this ancient practice of “resting in God” through simple breathing exercises, stillness and prayer can lower our blood pressure, enrich our days, and deepen our faith journeys.

We meet weekly on Tuesday mornings, on Zoom. Technology allows people to join in our gathering from distant geographies and retirement communities. Despite being apart, for those who gathered to share this time together, it has been a rich experience of community, compassion, and glimmers of God’s grace in this stillness.

As we recognize that each person’s spiritual journey is a unique one, we spent time focusing on a variety of practices to enter into the stillness and peace of God. These practices included:

- Centering prayer
- Breathing exercises
- Readings from wise souls such as Henri Nouwen, Richard Rohr, and Joyce Rupp
- Lectio Divina...meditating on scriptural passages
- Contemplation
- Sharing the fruit of our prayers

We are reminded that meditation is not an end unto itself but a path to finding greater peace, courage, and joy amidst the inevitable challenges we face in life. And so we will continue to gather via Zoom every Tuesday morning to keep practicing our faith through meditation and soulful conversation, in joy and in prayer.

We welcome new friends who would like to join us. And we welcome those whose responsibilities prevent them from joining us on Zoom, yet who appreciate the weekly emails and suggested readings for personal prayer and reflection.

This year too we mourned the loss of our beloved and wise friend, Mary Hill Canavan, who co-led this group with me for many years. I lift up her memory with joy and thanksgiving. She taught us a great deal about God, about Grace, and about living.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Judy Swahnberg

2023 Annual Report

Christian Service Support Board Annual Report 2023

The purpose of the Christian Service Board is to promote and facilitate opportunities to carry out Christ's call to love our neighbors and to care for the least of these, knowing that in so doing we find joy and purpose in our own lives and bring vitality into the life of the congregation. The Board will seek to fulfill its mission by:

- *distributing financial resources allocated by the congregation to local, national and international charities; and*
- *supporting and publicizing church ministry groups, Christian partnerships, and opportunities for members of our congregation to engage in service to our fellow human beings as part of our participation in our Church and an exercise of our faith.*

Mission Moments: Short talks from our Ministry teams and Grant recipients.

Honduras Hope, Cecilia Lobo

Habitat for Humanity, Molly Pietrantonio

African Indian Alliance (AIA), Katie McCabe

Green Congregation Challenge introduction, Elaine Vildzius

Common Cathedral, Rev. Carington Moore

Wellesley ABC (A Better Chance), Debora White

Second Chances Clothing Collection, read by Donna McCabe

Thom Charles River Early Intervention Christmas Gift project, Sue Spencer

Southborough Safe Spaces, Sarah Whiteman (will be in January 2024)

Special Offerings: Sunday morning offerings specially designated each year.

Easter, UCC Global H.O.P.E.

Special Collection for earthquake victims in Turkey taken in February

Christmas, The Outdoor Church of Cambridge

Annual Grant Awards: Funds allotted each year from the Stewardship money to be sent to deserving organizations doing God's work near and far. We included two new organization both of which support the LGBTQ community. Those are BAGLEY and Southborough Safe Spaces. This year's recipients are:

African Indian Alliance

BAGLEY

Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries

Ecclesia Ministries, Common Cathedral

Family Promise Metrowest

Friends of Boston's Homeless

Habitat for Humanity, Greater Worcester Chapter

Honduras Hope

New Life Furniture Bank of MA

2023 Annual Report

Southborough Safe Spaces

Wellesley A Better Chance (Wellesley ABC)

Wellesley Food Pantry

Ministry Teams: Our ministry teams' activity throughout the year:

- AIA held an information session regarding their work in March.
- A team of 10 went to build with Habitat for Humanity in March.
- Family Promise held three hosting weeks throughout the year.
- Feed the Hungry ministry team fed and worshipped with Common Cathedral in the spring and the fall.
- The Green Team; our newest official ministry team, completed Level 1 of the Green Congregation Challenge and began work on Level 2.
- Honduras Hope sold handmade pine needle baskets, created by the women of Plan Grande, Honduras
- The Pumpkin Patch was a huge success as always with proceeds split between UCC Global HOPE and the youth service trips.
- Many bags of clothing were collected for Second Chances in November.
- The congregation generously supported the families of Thom Charles River Early Intervention by supplying wrapped Christmas gifts and gift cards for over 300 people.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Vildzius, chair

2023 Annual Report

African Indian Alliance:
A Siddi Partnership, Inc.



The African Indian Alliance was formed to support Siddis (African Indians) to realize their aspirations for, access to, and preparation for education and the improvement of their social and material circumstances. We continue to be committed to our mission of helping Siddi and non-Siddi children and communities in rural villages of Karnataka, India. Our efforts are focused on creating educational opportunities, as well as supporting students financially to aid with school fees and necessary materials and items needed for their education.

Reverend Dr. Pashington Obeng continues to serve his valuable role as Board President. The board is currently composed of Katie McCabe (Chair), Kelly Ford (Clerk), David Otten (Treasurer), Stephen Kofi Obeng, Nana Poku, Fiona Jamal Almeida, and Jessica Banks Gallo.

We continue to have a strong partnership with the Sisters of the Holy Cross. The Sisters stationed in Mainalli changed in this year and Fiona was able to travel there in the summer to help with the transition and explanation of the AIA partnership. The Sisters were able to identify many students aged primary to college levels in need of financial assistance for educational fees and materials and AIA supported them. AIA continues to support seven after school tuition centers in various languages and villages. These centers have a teacher supporting students with homework and test studying, and provides them a space to focus on their studies and give value to education.

We received a thank you note from a student Jareena who we have been supporting for years and was able to complete her studies to become a teacher.

In March 2023 we presented a mission moment and held an educational presentation for the church community about the Siddi population and our outreach within the communities and with educational scholarships.

Our goals in 2024 are to continue to support the tuition centers and individual student needs. We also hope to work with the Sisters in Mainalli to begin the work of renovating the girls living hostel in Mainalli to give them more space that is healthier and conducive to young womens growth physically and educationally. We will work on streamlining our scholarship application and policies and procedures for our board and partnerships on the ground in India. We still hope to grow and advance our board, complete a new website, and educate our community here in the U.S on ways to support our partners in the Siddi community.

We remain grateful to the Hills Church Christian Service Support Board and the members of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church for their ongoing support and funding that make our mission programs possible.

Submitted by Katie McCabe



2023 Annual Report

Christmas Gifts Ministry



For almost 30 years our church has shopped for Christmas gifts for low-income families from Waltham. It is an annual tradition that church members look forward to every year. Clinicians from Thom Charles River Early Intervention submit names and wish lists from families. Church members sign-up to shop for individuals or entire families on SignUpGenius. They deliver the wrapped presents to the church where the clinicians pick them up to deliver to their families.

Four young people from the church volunteered on Saturday to help unload presents from the cars. A big thank you to Henry, Calliope, Cooper, & Simon! Sunday School children made Christmas cards to share with the families.

We had a very big list this year! It took the efforts of almost 100 people (members, friends and family, and EI clinicians) to make sure that all 338 people on our list (91 families) received presents. 77 people shopped. 22 people donated money (\$6300) some of which was used to purchase gift cards for adults. The rest will be used throughout the year to respond to urgent needs (primarily food and diapers).

Church members tell me that it is a joy to shop for these families who have so little, and that it's a blessing to do it. They shop with their children to teach them the joy of giving and caring for others. A parent shared with me that her teenage daughter crocheted a gift to go with the requested 'Learn to Crochet' kit. People who are unable to shop donate money. It's all such an amazing outpouring of love and caring!

Because of the need to maintain confidentiality, the shoppers never get to meet the families for whom they so carefully and thoughtfully shop. But the clinicians know what a difference it makes for these families. A box of diapers frees up money for food. A winter coat and boots keep children warm for their walk to school. Toys provide an opportunity for fun and learning. But it's more than that. As one grateful family wrote in a thank you note "It's made such a difference to know that, out there, there are people who care....and even though they don't have halos, their hearts show they are angels! Your gift lifted my spirits and helped my girls feel loved. Blessings to you!"

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in this ministry!

Respectfully Submitted,

Sue Spencer
Christmas Gifts Ministry

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2023 Annual Report for Family Promise Metrowest (FPM)



6 MULLIGAN STREET, NATICK, MA 01760
WWW.FAMILYPROMISEMETROWEST.ORG
508-318-4820

Background Information - The Wellesley Hills Congregational Church voted in 2008 to join FPM. Family Promise is a national program that provides temporary shelter, meals and support for homeless families through weeklong stays in houses of worship all over the country. Our network, Family Promise Metrowest, is one of 200 affiliates nationwide that have served over 700,000 guests since inception. Family Promise operates other programs out of the Natick Day Center; transitional housing, independent housing, and rent assistance to avoid eviction.

“Our mission is to transform the lives of families with children that are facing homelessness by mobilizing a diverse community to provide shelter, education, and comprehensive support. We serve low- and moderate-income families with at least one child under the age of 18 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Our families are Massachusetts residents, with priority given to families from the Metro west region. We welcome all genders and family compositions as long as all adults were part of the nuclear family and living together when the family became homeless.”

FPM consists of 19 host congregations and 32 support congregations. WHCC is one of the host congregations.

In mid-2022, the newly renovated Day center, welcomed families into their temporary and static shelter site. Located at 6 Mulligan Street in Natick, the building now houses several offices, three bathrooms with showers for the guests, a large kitchen, meeting rooms, living area, and finished basement with a playroom and storage lockers. The Center serves as a home and home base, where guest families spend their non-working hours, receive counseling, participate in job training classes, shower, and do laundry.

Host and Support congregations now provide support with three primary roles at the shelter in Natick: Grocery Shoppers, Dinner Chefs and Dinner Hosts, described below. More volunteer roles are expected to be added as this new way of hosting evolves and it becomes clear what else might be needed.

Dinner Chefs: Volunteer chefs will prepare and deliver four dinners per week on a set weekly schedule. On alternate nights, families will eat leftovers or prepare their own meals. Congregational coordinators will consult with chefs to ensure no meal repetitions. (4 roles/week, each can be shared by two chefs.)

Dinner Hosts: On nights when dinner is provided by a congregation, dinner hosts will be present from 6-8pm to set up for dinner, share a meal and companionship with our families, and clean up afterward. Post-dinner, hosts can be available to offer support to parents or children (such as homework help, job search, or other needs expressed by a family). (Minimum 4-8 roles per week.)

Grocery Shoppers: Volunteers shop for and donate supplies that we distribute to families across all our programs, including breakfast/lunch items for shelter families and non-perishable pantry items for families in LIFE/SAIL programs. Grocery donations for shelter families will focus on supplying items that the families in all of the Programs need.

Volunteers from the congregations work together to meet this commitment, enabling each to contribute according to their abilities and capacity, while also developing valuable relationships that will strengthen our community. WHCC weeks to host in 2024 include: April 1-4, July 22-25 and Dec 9-12.

Over the years, FPM has grown from being a shelter to a comprehensive program addressing the needs of the families we serve. These additional programs allow FPM to support more families while addressing a gap in services.

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- The SAIL program is a transitional living program to assist families after moving out of shelter. Case Management and subsidies are provided for one year following the move to ensure sustainability.
- The “Steps to Success” program focuses on comprehensive employment support and education. This program provides the means for families to maximize their earning potential while in shelter and transitional living.
- The LIFE program is a homelessness prevention program that supports families who are at risk of eviction but not yet homeless. Families may get one time help with a months rent, which is sometimes all they need to avoid homelessness.

2023 Highlights: Provided volunteers and support for two host weeks, including Thanksgiving week.

2024 Goals include:

Recruit another coordinator for WHCC

Educate our congregation on the expanded FPM offerings and volunteer opportunities

Recruit new volunteers from WHCC and Temple Beth Elohim

Continue to incorporate FPM High School Clubs and NCL in our volunteer outreach efforts

Respectfully submitted,

Neely Dodge, Chair

2023 Annual Report

Green Team

The purpose of the Green Team is to engage congregation members to understand and act upon environmental issues. The Southern New England United Church of Christ Green Congregation Challenge is a step-by-step approach that takes small, but consequential, steps towards protecting God's creation. The GCC has 4 levels to help congregants grow in our awareness and action. Each level has 5 categories: Educate; Organize; Reduce, Reuse, Rethink; Connect and Advocate.

The Green Team seeks to fulfill its mission by working through the 4 levels of the GCC and completing as many steps as possible.

This year the Green Team has completed many steps of the 4 levels of the GCC, including working with the office staff to reduce waste in the church buildings, connecting with UCC environmental ministries, creating a butterfly garden, installing bike racks in the parking lot and increasing the recycling and composting after church gatherings.

A grant of \$1,000 was given to the church for the specific use by the Green Team to help fulfill its mission.

Looking forward, the Green Team will connect with local environmental advocates and sustainability groups and continue to work on the GCC checklist. New members and suggestions are always welcome.

Green Team members: Bonnie and Noele Roalsen, co-chairs, Caleb Roalsen, Doug Eisenhart, Marilyn Nutting, Elaine Vildzius, Dave Otten, Laurie Otten, Martha Stowell, Tina and Julia Andersson, co-chairs.

Respectfully submitted by,

Tina Andersson



2023 Annual Report

Honduras Hope

Honduras Hope would like to thank the WHCC for its many years of faithful support from the CSSB and members of the congregation. In December church members purchased pine needle baskets and hot pads made by the Plan Grande Women's Co-op from pine needles they gather locally. Over \$900 was raised! Proceeds from the sale helps these women support their families.



Honduras Hope is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that for more than 22 years has been working through long-term partnerships with two poor and marginalized communities: Plan Grande, a reservation for the Indigenous Tolupan people, and San José, a mountain community of squatters. Honduras Hope focuses on programs that provide a path out of poverty and toward a full and prosperous life in Honduras.

These are just some of the things support from the WHCC makes possible:

- San José and 7 remote mountain communities have access to medical care at the San José Clinic, which is staffed by a full-time nurse.
- Each year an average of 18 university students receive scholarships, providing a path out of the culture of poverty.
- This year 16 teens from San José and 4 other mountain communities lived in the Honduras Hope Boarding House so they could attend high school in Yoro.
- This year 34 students from Plan Grande attended high school in Yoro with financial support from Honduras Hope. 7 seniors graduated in November.
- The Girls' Empowerment Program encourages Plan Grande teenage girls to stay in school. This year 5 of the HS graduates were members of the Girls' Empowerment Program.
- Regular tutoring sessions during the school year provide academic support.
- Plan Grande finally has electricity! Now students will have light at night for homework, computers & cell phones can be charged, and refrigeration and stoves become a possibility.
- Preschoolers receive a nourishing hot meal a minimum of twice a week.
- In Plan Grande, the Women's Co-op makes pine needle baskets and just qualified to receive government grants. Their income helps support their families.
- Dilapidated houses get repairs.
- Work is progressing on a new water system for San José. Since the old system failed, people must walk 3 hours to get water. More funding is needed to complete this project.

Food, clean drinking water, housing, and education...these are what your financial support brings to the people of San José and Plan Grande. But more than this, you bring hope for a better future to vulnerable and marginalized people. Praise God!

Respectfully Submitted,

Sue Spencer

Honduras Hope Liaison for the CSSB

Honduras Hope Board Member

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Plan Grande electric



San Jose Health



Tutoring sessions



Nutrition program

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Habitat for Humanity 2023



Wellesley Hills Congregational Church's CSSB awarded a \$9,000 grant to Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/ Greater Worcester (HFHMWGW) this year. HFHMWGW will use the grants to support its mission of putting God's love into action by collaborating with their partners to build homes, communities, and hope in 42 central Massachusetts cities which comprise its mission zone. HFHMWGW achieves this humanitarian mission through direct funding from donors and a network of volunteers to build homes.

HFHMWGW builds safe and affordable homes for low-income families who do not qualify for mortgage programs. These families typically live in spaces that may be too small for the family size, unhealthy, unsafe, or unaffordable. Qualifying low-income families earn 30-60% of the median income earned by households in the communities where they live. HFHMWGW also assists families earning up to 80% of the area's median income to repair owner-occupied homes. Habitat assists low-income families regardless of age, race, ethnicity, faith, and background. The organization also helps veterans, families with autistic children, refugee families as well as homeless families.

WHCC's Habitat team went to Worcester, MA to paint playhouse kits for veteran families on March 18, 2023. Habitat's Operation Playhouse Program organizes volunteers from various organizations to build playhouses for the children of veteran and current military families.

We plan to participate in multiple projects in 2024 starting on January 13, 2024, during MLK weekend.

Respectfully submitted,

Nana Poku
Co-chair

2023 Annual Report

New Beginnings Wellesley Hills, Inc.



New Beginnings Wellesley Hills

The best group of people you never
wanted to meet!

New Beginnings Wellesley Hills, Inc. entered our 35th year, continuing our mission to maintain a safe environment for adults to heal emotionally, spiritually, physically, and psychologically from the loss of a relationship due to spousal or family death, divorce, separation or other personal trauma. We are a self-directed, peer-to-peer, volunteer organization normally meeting weekly.

Covid-19 continued to complicate our planning, affected the ability to carry out our mission, and created financial challenges. Our organization's foundation and strength is person-to-person support and empathy. During most of the year, however, we met via a remote, on-line meeting scheme that attempted to create a community similar to weekly meetings. This was finally relaxed somewhat toward the end of the year, allowing us to meet in person within WHCC guidelines for safe gatherings. This was evaluated weekly, and remote meetings are still held as necessary. Some people will choose to remain in isolation out of an abundance of caution, and isolation is the #1 enemy of grief. So, we look forward to more stability and the pandemic's end.

In the face of the "new normal" of 2021, our administrative director, Jodi Pettingill, and her team managed to maintain the key administrative, outreach and compliance functions needed to keep the organization moving forward. The Board of Trustees thanks these dedicated people for their tireless efforts in 2021. New Beginnings offers a supportive and consistent environment for those we seek to help. While we are not professional counsellors, it is well documented that peer-facilitated small support groups are powerful tools that provide individualized attention, support and comfort for healing from the trauma of loss. This has been the core of New Beginnings from our founding more than three decades ago. Our success also results from dedicated hard-working volunteers who help further the New Beginnings mission.

Our primary groups include a widow/widowers group, a divorced/separated group, and a transition group, each currently with their own break-out meeting. The widow/widowers group and the divorced/separated group each deal with the all-important initial stages of those losses. A transition group, developed in 2021, helps members move forward successfully. Combined groups and self-development discussions are held as needed.

New Beginnings was recently blessed to receive support from the WHCC and the Christian Service Support Board, which we deeply appreciate! It is our honor and pleasure to be in the WHCC "family," and we look forward to this ongoing partnership to support our valuable ministry. We welcome your participation.

We welcome any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact us at jodipettingill@hotmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

New Beginnings Wellesley Hills, Inc.

The Board of Trustees,

Susan Gordon, David Johnson, Michael Carlton, Sara Kennedy, Deidre O'Hare, Anuj Mokashi

Jodi Pettingill, Director

2023 Annual Report

Wellesley Food Pantry (WFP)



The Wellesley Food Pantry, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, continues to operate under the original mission statement developed for its opening in 1989: *To provide supplemental and emergency food to Wellesley residents in need.*

WFP operates primarily on Mondays and Tuesdays – Mondays to receive, date check, sort, and store donations, as well as to restock shelves, and Tuesdays to distribute food to our clients.

We are currently serving approximately 190 households (the number can fluctuate on a weekly basis and has steadily been increasing this year), comprising about 400 individuals: 41% of our clients are age 60 or older; 28% are 18 or younger. Most families come to us for food once a month, although a handful come twice a month – another number that has been increasing in a year of escalating prices.



We are so generously supported by the Wellesley community with both food and financial donations. The vast majority of the funds we receive go to purchasing food, as we are all volunteers, and the church graciously provides the space in which we operate. We purchase hundreds of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each week and meat, fish, tofu, and other items for our refrigerators and freezers. We also buy nonperishable food when community donations are insufficient for our shelves to remain fully stocked. We are fortunate to have a wonderful donor who brings us dozens of jugs of milk every week.

The Hills Church has been an incredible partner in our shared mission to provide food to those in need, and our Board is so grateful for all the support you have provided over the years. The grant from the Christian Service Support Board is most welcome this year, as food costs have risen so dramatically.

We are thankful for the faithful service of WHCC parishioners currently volunteering at WFP, including Tricia Frank (also a board member), Chris Anne Banks, Tina Vasconcelles, George Pettee, Dana Brennan, Andrew Altenbach and Bob Minetti, and are also grateful for the support of the ever-cheerful and efficient Andrea Bellarosa.

*Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Scott, Director*

2023 Annual Report

Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills

“You, like the little caterpillar, will grow up, unfold your wings and fly off into the future” (Eric Carle)



Our mission at Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills is to provide a safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate learning environment for all children. We strive to foster creativity, exploration, and problem-solving skills, through our play-based, hands-on early learning program. With encouragement, children develop socially and emotionally to become responsible, independent, members of our school community. Expert teachers partner with families to provide an educational environment that allows children to develop to their full potential, while creating a lifetime love of learning.

The return to school this fall brought with it excitement and full classrooms! Parents attended “Parent Night” and children visited their classrooms during orientation. All of the classes have enjoyed welcoming parents into the school during the day as guest readers and for special events. In addition, Music and Imagination, Be Ahead of the Game and special science programs visit monthly to provide interactive programs to all of the classes. The Wellesley Hills Branch Library hosts our PK and TK students monthly for book selection and a special story hour. WNSH families have enjoyed supporting the WHCC church missions at the annual WHCC Pumpkin Patch, donating to the clothing drive and delivering food to the Food Pantry.



WNSH’s current school enrollment has increased steadily over the past four years. Our enrollment grew from 40 students in 2020-2021, to 65 students in 2021-2022, to 69 students in 2022-23 and now this year our school has 75 students enrolled. Registration for the 2024-25 school year is underway and we are currently at 65 registered students, with waitlists in the younger classrooms. Returning students/siblings from Wellesley, Weston, Sherborn, Needham and Medfield as well as new families, make up the current enrollment numbers. With an increase in students, the rooms are staffed with two Lead Teachers and one Assistant Teacher. This allows us to maintain a low “student to teacher” ratio in each classroom. Families appreciate our ability to provide small group instruction and believe this sets us apart from other nursery school programs.

In addition, the Extended Day Program is offered three days per week from October - June. Children in PS1 & PS2 stay until 1:30 or 2:30 pm, enjoy lunch with friends, have extra playground time, and participate in stories and activities. PK & TK have an Extended Day option from 1:30-2:30 pm where they enjoy group games, special classroom activities and time on the playground.



As we look ahead to 2024, WNSH anticipates full classroom enrollment, a large extended day group and multiple opportunities for families to become partners in their child’s educational journey. Our teachers continue to provide positive social and learning experiences for the children of Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills, making us one of the most desirable, respected preschools in the area.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Dawson, Director

2023 Annual Report

