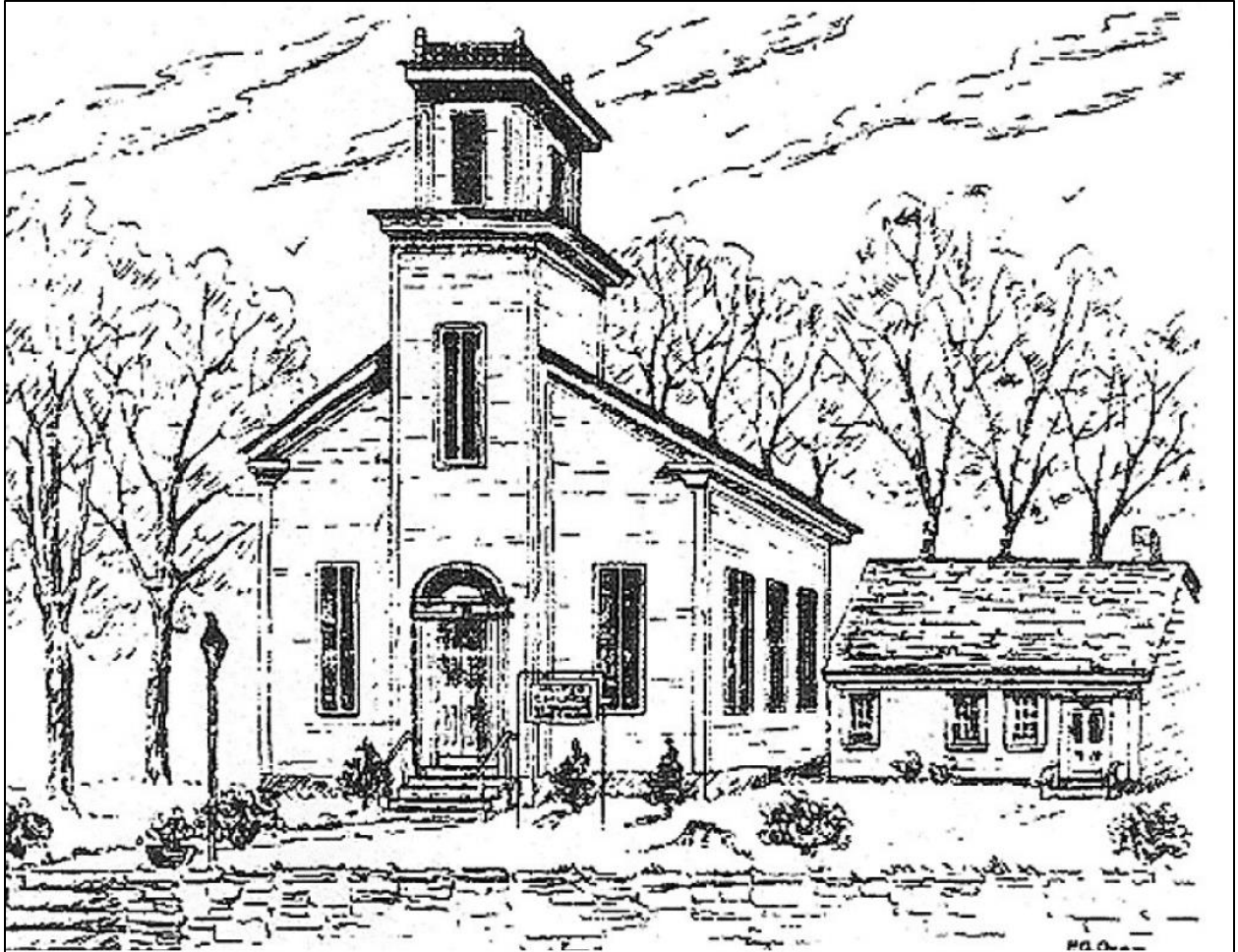


# Warren United Church

## Report on 2023 Activities



January 12, 2023

In accordance with the By-Laws of the Warren United Church, the Annual Meeting of the membership for the year ending December 31, 2023 will be held on January 28, 2024 at 11:15 in the sanctuary of the Warren Church.

The following articles will be presented:

- Article 1: To approve the minutes from the January 29, 2023 Annual Meeting
- Article 2: To approve the minutes from the October 22, 2023 Congregational Meeting.
- Article 3: To hear and act upon the reports of the various officers and organizations of the Church.
- Article 4: To elect Church leadership.
- Article 5: To act upon the proposed budget.
- Article 6: To share expressions of gratitude from the past year and hopes for the next.

Annual Reports have been made available via the weekly Church Newsletter and printed copies at the church. Printed copies can also be mailed, by request to the clerk, Kasey Kathan ([kmkathan@gmail.com](mailto:kmkathan@gmail.com))

Respectfully submitted,

Kasey Kathan

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## Minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting

*(subject to approval by congregational vote at 2024 Annual Meeting)*

Attendance: 25 in the room, 3 virtually – quorum was declared with 28 members present.

### **Welcome and Call to Order: Moderator Nancy Rhoades**

Robert's Rule of order introduced.

Moment of prayer: *Holy spirit of guidance be with us today as we gather to attend to the business of this church. Help us to be present to your presence and help us to let go of our own agendas. We ask for courage to bear witness to your faith and that you help us to love what you love. Everything and everyone is connected, and to pray for one part is to pray for the whole. In your name we gather and we pray today.*

### **Approval of minutes from 2022**

Moved to accept with no motion to adjust by Janet Ellison– move to accept minutes as they are, with no motion to adjust. Seconded by Karen McDonald. Minutes approved by majority verbal vote.

### **Article 1: To hear and act upon the reports of the various officers and organizations of the Church.**

Reports are a reflection of what has been accomplished over the last year, well done all. Nancy Rhoades noted a few special reports that were included in the 2022 annual report. In particular, the report on the council retreat was noted, along with the progress that has been made in completion of the survey and work being done to listen to our church community. Noted that the budget portion of the report will be acted upon separately in Article 3. John Donaldson reflected appreciation for the thoughtful compilation.

Moved to accept – Janet Ellison, Seconded by Chrissy Rivers. Reports, as submitted, approved by majority verbal vote.

### **Article 2: To elect Church leadership.**

Noted that church leadership nomination sheets were included in the bulletin.

Moderator Rhoades provided thanks for the church leadership of the past year and encouraged others to step up into positions. Leadership is an opportunity for which the members of the church are sincerely thankful.

In discussion: Karen MacDonald – requested to move off of Christian Education, as reflected in the nominations form, as she's was anticipating moving into missions. Heather Morehouse– offered to move onto Deacons. Fran Plewak – offered to move into Deacon's. Sandra Brodeur – offered to move into vice-moderator position.

Final slate of nominees, with adjustments after discussion was read to those gathered.

Motion to vote on the slate as presented verbally with additions from the discussion.

Motion to accept and approve the church leadership nominees by Eric Allen, seconded by Judy Phelon.

Approval by verbal vote in favor of new slate of leadership.

**Article 3: To act upon the proposed budget.**

Budget presented by Treasurer Bruce McDonald – All financial statements were included in the report. One thing omitted from the report, but that was a material change, was the transfer of operational accounts to Northfield bank from TD bank. This was in response to a hack at TD and due to the convenience of having access to a local branch. No finances were lost from the hack of the TD account. Also used this opportunity to update the signers on the accounts. Current signers on bank and Van Guard accounts include: Bruce McDonald, John Donaldson, Bob Cummiskey and Dough Stoehr.

Opened opportunity to discuss financial statements. – No questions or additional points of discussion were raised.

On the budget – Treasurer’s notes of interest: Pledge revenue continued to decrease, although plate revenue increased, it is the second year that pledge income has decreased. In turn, this has increased reliance on the Emma Ford Fund (EFF). The distributions out of the EFF for missions and the building were decreased this past year, because the EFF, as most investments have, declined. The general goal was to keep the withdrawals from the EFF at approximately 8%. That said, the amount is a moving target given fund fluctuations, and end of year date. The building amount withdrawal was decreased, but was still targeted to be sufficient to address work in the coming year, as identified by the Trustees. Christian Education budget items were removed, but to clarify, this does not prevent us from using funds to accomplish any identified program. There are other funds targeted for youth activities, it was removed as budget line item because the activities haven’t occurred in past years utilizing these budgeted funds.

*Discussion:*

Question on how much money has been allocated for the minister’s discretionary fund and whether sufficient (Joan Cnossen). Response – the amount is somewhat left to Missions and Special Missions, anticipating \$5,000 from missions, \$5,000 from the special mission’s fund, for a total of \$10,000 consistent with previous years. Reverend Erin Reardon contributed that at the end of this year, the discretionary fund was running short, and Missions was able to provide additional funds to cover the additional need. Functionally, Mission’s has been checking in on the ministerial discretionary fund have been checking in quarterly to ensure that funds aren’t being spent at too great a rate. However, needs are up across the board. The Community Fund is doing what they’re able, but since December, service referrals to other organizations have not been as successful. With the 10k and additional mission’s funds we haven’t had to say that assistance is not available.

On page 24, note made to the items that the Trustees have designated as building needs. Also, note that repairs were made to the furnace, is this still a major concern, question was raised as to whether or not sufficient funds were available to address that issue should there be a problem (Freddie Mahlmann). Trustee Jake Rivers – the furnace is old and likely will need to be replaced in the next 2-3 years. The major problem was fixed last year, and it’s been running well since, so the Treasurers chose to move funds to other more urgent projects. Judy Phelon noted vibrations that she’s felt while sitting in the pews. Trustee Doug Stoehr noted that this could be traditional noise and vibration from the furnace, but could also be the primary motor of the air filtration system that was recently installed.

Move to accept the budget as proposed by John Donaldson, seconded by Eric Allen.

Opportunity for discussion – Freddie Mahlmann noted that putting together a budget for this church with resources is a challenge. Credit was given to those organizing for balancing needs, the body/building of the church of the health of the church's finances. Fay Kathan – noted that Emma Ford is responsible for the great gift that this church has, and we should all give thanks for her foresight.

Verbal vote on the budget as presented was called for and verbally approved with no opposition.

**Article 4: To reflect on the past year and share hopes for the year ahead.**

A note received from Jane Goldstein was read to those in attendance reflecting appreciation for being kept abreast from a distance through the newsletter and reflecting on the generosity to community by the Warren Church both in the past and present. Truly the little church with a big heart with the ability to rise from potholes with grace and dignity.

Bruce McDonald – Reflection that we're blessed to have the minister that we do, and the core group of people that we do, but acknowledged that we're facing challenges and battling demographics that are threatening churches here in the northeast, if not the whole country. Going forward, we all need to think and strategize on what this church looks like in the next 5-10 years and what we can do to facilitate that transition. One thing we can do is build and facilitate a better relationship with the Waitsfield church as they may face similar struggles. Really encourage the church council to see if there's interest in coordinating a synergy committee again, or some joint council meetings. We're living in the same world, dealing with the same issues, we know each other well and there's a lot of energy when we do have joint services. Such relationships may be an important strategic move that needs to be pursued into the future.

John Donaldson – general agreement with comments that were made. We have these annual meetings every year, to reflect, celebrate and plan for the year ahead, but we need a different long-term plan. This church would not survive without the EFF, our financial intake would not support a full-time minister. Covid has hit this church hard. To Erin's credit, she's done well, but this is hard. Worried that the business of the day by the council, will get in the way of taking long-term planning action. John made a motion:

*Motion – that a special committee is formed to do long range planning of the church, separate from the operations. This committee would focus on what is needed to grow, but also what alternative options may be available-inclusive of merging the Waitsfield and Warren churches and to report back by the next annual meeting.*

John Donaldson reflected back several years ago to when this church was developing its profile for the search committee. The church received compliments on the profile, but the church might not be able to write that same profile now. A special committee could address these issues, along with other plans for the future.

Motion was seconded by Doug Stoehr.

*Discussion:*

Chrissy Rivers – Not opposed fundamentally but having served in the synergy group in past years, and part of the conversations, remembers resistance. We can search it out, and I don't think there is a loss in that conversation, but could we take the energy of this potential committee and the people willing to do this option and turn it to community outreach. The people that have historically done this type of community outreach aren't here, but this is a spiritual place and God's will is being shown and leading us in a different way. A fact-finding council would be great, but the Church should also put in the effort to organize and plan community events. Because Emma Ford gave us money, we should tap into that spirit of generosity, have less meetings, and use time to better engage the community. Have we done everything we can do to engage and do the outreach to the community? In favor of an outreach taskforce – plan community events, better use money, make gatherings possible, youth group, food etc. If we're not being spiritually filled maybe we need to take action and lean into doing.

Joan Cnossen – I've also thought about this issue, and what is missing from our church, and that's the children. Vacation Bible School use to formerly fill the church. Instead of putting energy into a long-term plan, why can't we put that energy into bringing the young families back into the church. That's the energy we need and where we should be focusing our time to support the future of this church. When we have young people, that turns into middle schoolers bring skills and gifts into the church. That's what this church needs.

Don Rhoades – I don't think it needs to be either or - I was glad to hear John Donaldson say that this is strategic visioning, not a committee to pursue joining with Waitsfield, it's important that it's only one option. I feel such a strong bond with this church community, to me joining with Waitsfield is the fail-safe option, but I think that there is a lot that we can do to grow our community and bring energy back to this community. We've underestimated the blow that Covid brought to church communities. Buddhism has taught me that – things are impermanent. I feel a closer bond now with this community and there is strength in that. I think there's a lot we can do, and energy will come when something is seen that can be useful and we should let the spirit guide us. If the committee tackled energy in conjunction with the potential option for Waitsfield, that could be really beneficial.

Hans Kessler– John raised a good point that this church relies on EFF, but many other organizations rely on funds that they don't directly raise. This isn't solely a church problem, many organizations that are critical for community functions don't have sustainable plans. Additionally, raises a question as to whether or not salaries in the budget were adjusted for cost-of-living increases. In discussion, it was affirmed that there had been an increase. Additionally, Hans expressed support for the idea of an outreach committee.

Fran Plewak – In reflection on the discussion, what the church needs a publicity expert. We certainly need a long-term plan, but we need energy spent on revitalizing and advertising this church and the great things we do and can do.

Nancy Rhoades – I'm hearing two things, there's a near term need to do what we're able to do now, but we also need a 'map' to understand what approaches might be possible moving into a more distant future. To identify potential opportunities and what might be inhibiting progress into the future. I don't see these as two separate things.

Bruce McDonald– I'm in support of a special committee, but I also suggest that that some of this is the job of the church council. It's the same core group of people that will be doing the work of this church

regardless of whether it's in a special committee or in regular council activities. I'm not sure creating a task force is the answer when we have an elected leadership already in place to do these things.

John Donaldson – In a perfect world that would be possible, but there's skepticism that action is going to be taken by the council. The retreat summary reflected a suite of problems, some of which have been discussed here today, but no activities have been taken in the last six months.

Chrissy Rivers – Raised the past success of Melodie Showacre and how wherever she goes the children follow. Having the informal opportunity for participation and invitation, or potentially the opportunity for a small stipend to support her work might be something the church should think about.

Don Rhoades – asked John Donaldson whether he has people in mind willing to serve on such a committee.

John Donaldson – Can only speak for self, but willing to put in the time and work, and believes others will be as well.

Don Rhoades – If the strategic planning committee is focusing on all options, Don expressed willingness to participate as well.

Request for the motion to be reread the group –

*Motion – that a special committee is formed to do long range planning of the church, separate from the operations. This committee would focus on what is needed to grow, but also what alternative options may be available-inclusive of merging the Waitsfield and Warren churches and to report back by the next annual meeting.*

Freddie Mahlmann – in thinking about a strategic plan, thinking 5-10 years down the road, my concern is that the easy take-away will be: We should join the Waitsfield church. That this would lead to the community conversation being cut short. I worry about being in a community conversation with Waitsfield members, when this hasn't been solidified in our own congregation. This idea has been bandied about over the years. Part of what I can commit to as moderator is looking at how the Waitsfield church is structured and where they are right now, a lot has changed since synergy. I don't know what the status of our fellow community church and see that as part of my job.

John Donaldson – the idea of merger has been on the table for many, many years, and it isn't a foregone conclusion because of this consideration of past conversations. This has been done in other churches in the conference, there are resources, and this was being discussed during the pastor search being completed by both churches. We need to be realistic though and even if there may be resistance both here and there, we need to continue the discussion. The church isn't growing, and the EFF will run out. We need to face the reality of that and think about what the alternatives may be.

Questioned called for vote – Doug Stoehr

By a show of hands: in favor -3 zoom, 18, none opposed, one abstaining. Motion has been passed.



**Article 5: To transact all business brought forth before this meeting.**

Brent Adams— as part of reviewing and reflecting on the past year, offered thanks to clerk for the report compilation. In that report would like to highlight our gratitude to Reverend Erin. Beyond supporting church activities, she's part of Interfaith Council, provides support in other UCC groups and is doing a lot.

Virginia Roth -as a long-term member of the church, I have a few comments: Namely, I would like to honor Carey Bennet for her dedication and consistent availability to this church. She's a wonderful example of someone you can count on. She's done this all without any financial compensation. She's planned, played, found musicians for enrichment and we're very fortunate to have her.

*MOTION: Church council meet and determine a financial gift to Carey for her work and dedication.*

Proposed by Virginia Roth, seconded by Joan Cnossen. By verbal vote all approved.

Freddie Mahlmann - I'm clearly stepping into huge shoes as I take over moderator. I'm a moderate counselor by nature. I find the narrow path between what appears to be challenging times ahead. With your support and God's support, I know that I can count on each of you for something and that you'll all be here to support me. It's thanks to Nancy who for the past two years has served to develop a new model of grace and compassion.

The meeting was adjourned, with prayer:

*Loving God, you have heard our hearts and we remain open.*

*For this moment we take a pause and a meal to gather together.*

*Bless this meal, bless these leaders and bless our church.*

Respectfully submitted,

Kasey Kathan

## Minutes of the October 22, 2023 Special Congregational Meeting

“Our Church: Where are we going from here?”

Freddie Mahlmann called the meeting to order at 10:36 am with a prayer.

Freddie recognized the members of the Long Term Planning Committee who have been meeting regularly since February: John Donaldson, Don Rhoades, Doug Stoehr, Judy Phelon, Ruth Ann Haskins, Bob Cumiskey, Freddie Mahlmann, Carey Bennett, Sandra Brodeur, Rev. Erin Reardon.

The Committee created the document “Where are we going from here” to outline the three proposals the committee is suggesting to revitalize and grow the church as embodied in our mission statement: *“We welcome people as they are, Share Jesus as He is, and Serve the community with love”*.

Doug and Freddie reviewed the three proposals.

1. A need for better community engagement - Reaching out to the Warren and Valley communities to form deeper connections, become more aware of our neighbors’ needs, and find new ways to *Serve the community with love*.
2. Accessibility (*We welcome people as they are*) - In recognition of various human needs and differences make the church as physically accessible and welcoming as possible.

Freddie noted that the Vermont Preservation Trust is doing an evaluation of the church building for historical preservation and they will look at the accessibility issue as well.

Don commented on the “children’s space” in the Waitsfield sanctuary and he thought that was a nice accessibility welcome for families with children.

Doug explained that Waitsfield removed pews in the front and back of the church to accommodate accessibility concerns. Our pew structure make that more challenging but will be looked at.

Various comments continued on the pros/cons of Waitsfield’s children’s space and it was agreed it is an idea and conversation to be continued and explored.

3. How to best integrate new people into the church (*We welcome people as they are, Share Jesus as He is*) - Church membership has been a requirement for taking part in some committees and leadership positions in the church. People need to feel welcome here and we should encourage everyone’s worship and participation in all aspects of the church community.

In light of the desire of some non-members to become more involved in the church, the following is recommended to take effect on a trial basis for 2024: Participation in the life of the church, including committee and board positions, for the term of those positions, shall be encouraged for all who participate in the church community without regard to formal membership.

It was clarified that this would be voted on today so it is in effect for the Annual Meeting in January 2024 for nominations and elections of positions. The trial proposed is a one-time trial that would be in effect for one term of each leadership/committee position.

Brent Adams stated he is troubled greatly about relaxing the requirements of membership to be a Deacon. He researched the definition of Membership, as defined by the UCC. Membership creates a covenant. Deacons assist the pastor in serving communion and Brent is concerned that a covenant with the church and membership should be required for a Deacon.

Don asked if a person can have a covenant with Jesus Christ without having membership in a church.

Fran Plewak asked how many people who aren't members would be interested in serving.

Bev Allen said that she is not an official member on paper but she is physically present as a participating person of the congregation and hopes she is accepted as such. She wishes to serve in whatever capacity she can with love. Giving everyone a chance to participate who loves this church is special.

Chrissy Rivers commented that she appreciated the conversation and viewpoints being shared.

Jake Rivers asked if this is an all or nothing... what positions require membership?

Doug clarified that Deacons, Trustees, Moderator, Vice Moderator and Treasurer all must be filled by members according to the current bylaws.

Mike Kleinhenz made a point that if someone is nominated who is not a member, they are not automatically voted in. The members of the congregation have to vote the person into position or not.

A question was raised regarding the proposal... if we're relaxing the membership requirement for leadership positions, does that apply to voting also? The committee clarified that this does NOT apply to voting. Congregational votes require membership to place a vote.

Lynne Kingsbury noted that although she is not a member of the Warren Church she is a member of the United Church of Christ.

Erin talked about leadership being insular because we have a small congregation and a small pool of leaders.

Marilyn Parker asked if there are other churches who have done this (relinquishing the membership requirement to hold leadership positions). Erin said that traditional models of leadership have to bend; Waitsfield restructured its leadership model (they no longer have a moderator among other changes) and similar things are happening in other churches.

Janet Ellison thanked the committee and said it was time to try something new given that church membership and our financial stability are both declining.

Tyne Pike-Sprenger asked if there's a training process for being a Deacon; would that make people more comfortable knowing a formal education was done between Pastor and Deacon with regard to

the sacrament of communion. Erin indicated she has not had formal training with Deacons as all of the current Deacons have held that position in times prior to her being Pastor.

Erin explained that traditionally consecration of communion is to be done by an ordained pastor but that requirement may be changing at the Conference level as open Pastor positions in remote churches are likely to be filled by non-ordained leaders given the lack of ordained Pastors available / interested in covering small remote churches.

Brent asked Erin to explain Covenant with Jesus; Erin replied that for her it is theological, the basis of what we believe (not a defined relationship with a church or establishment).

Susan Cummiskey mentioned that this was done historically... sometime in the past ten years or so, the requirement of membership to hold leadership positions was lifted for one year. That trial did not result in an influx of volunteers (non-members taking leadership positions) nor did it create a major downfall of the church, so it is probably low-risk to try it again. She also acknowledged Brent's concern regarding Deacons and noted that serving communion is one role that Deacons assist in, there are many other aspects of being a Deacon. Would it alleviate concerns about this trial if the Deacons as a group could self-select and decide within their group who is comfortable and interested in participating in serving communion and who is not. Maybe that could be a compromise to address this concern within the Board of Deacons.

Hans Kessler quoted what Jesus said to the Pharisees when he was questioned about healing on the Sabbath (are you so concerned with the laws that I can't heal on the Sabbath?) From his perspective, when faced with a concerning decision, if you reflect and act based on "What Would Jesus Do", you'll never go wrong.

Brent asked if the vote required a motion. It was confirmed a motion would be required to call the vote.

Erin commented (in regards to Susan's questions) that she felt it would put the Pastor and Deacons in a difficult place to be gatekeepers of serving communion.

Doug made a motion to vote on the proposal "In light of the desire of some non-members to become more involved in the church, the following is recommended to take effect on a trial basis for 2024: Participation in the life of the church, including committee and board positions, for the term of those positions, shall be encouraged for all who participate in the church community without regard to formal membership."

Don seconded.

Freddie asked if there was any further discussion.

Brent made a motion that we table the vote to a future date.

Brent's motion was not seconded.

Don made a motion that we modify the proposal to take effect as written but not include the position of Deacon.

Brent seconded Don's motion.

Susan clarified that the motion being voted on was to modify the proposal. Once that motion was approved or declined, the original proposed motion (with or without the modification) would then be voted on. Doug concurred that was correct.

No further discussion.

17 voted in favor of amending the proposal per Don's motion. 6 opposed. 2 abstained.

Doug then made a motion to vote on the proposal: "In light of the desire of some non-members to become more involved in the church, the following is recommended to take effect on a trial basis for 2024: Participation in the life of the church, including committee and board positions with the exception of Deacons, for the term of those positions, shall be encouraged for all who participate in the church community without regard to formal membership."

Don seconded.

There was no further discussion.

16 voted in favor. 4 opposed. 5 abstained.

Scott Bennett asked a clarifying question in regards to Proposal 1 on community engagement. Is the thinking about mission giving in regards to re-distributing our giving to more local charities or is it in regards to increasing our overall mission giving to include more local charities in addition to broader. Doug clarified the thought is to redistribute our giving to more local charities instead of national/global.

Don and Nancy led the congregation in singing the song they wrote, "This Old Church".

Freddie offered a closing prayer.

The meeting adjourned at 11:34 am.

Minutes respectfully submitted –  
Susan Cummiskey

## Pastor's Annual Report

2023 has been our most challenging year together since I began serving as Pastor. This year has presented challenges for the congregation and especially for leadership. The first half of the year, we experienced increased anxiety and dysfunction within the congregation. This was not surprising after nearly three years of pandemic and facing realities of our world, all while attempting to find our grounding in a church that looks different here and at a national level.

This year presented us with new and unfamiliar ground including both challenges and opportunities. Two productive and supportive teams were formed to address the needs of where we are: The Long-Term Planning Team (LTPT) and Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), the latter in existence previously but less active and intentional than the current group.

The Long-Term Planning Team (LTPT) began its work in late winter/early spring of 2023. It was clear early on that the group needed to be more representative of the congregation. That is when five more folks joined the group including myself. While we struggled to hear one another during the first few meetings, in mid-summer we experienced a breakthrough both in our communication and willingness to work together.

The Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) also began meeting in late winter/early spring recognizing that this group's work, planning, presence, and support would be vital in a year of high anxiety, change, and sabbatical planning. The PRC began serving and supporting the congregation in 2023, will continue through the sabbatical period, and will play an important role in strengthening communication among the congregation and Pastor as we move ahead.

As the congregation continues to explore where it is, why it is, and how it can best serve the needs of its community, these leadership groups have begun the work of addressing needs and marking priorities in leadership, ministry, and congregational life. I especially want to thank our Moderator, PRC, LTPT, and Council for keeping us moving forward as we work through change, challenge, grief, and address important issues such as: membership, engaging and integrating newcomers, accessibility, and living into the church's mission today.

Some highlights from this past year include 2 baptisms and 2 weddings! We held numerous funerals and graveside services. We tried a new Lenten Series in worship by Sanctified Art that especially worked well with worship and music planning. The art, poetry, devotionals for folks at home, question cards about faith, social media package, children's bulletins, and more added to the experience of the season and theme of seeking.

In the summer months, we saw increases in newcomers, seasonal folks, visitors, as well as those in crisis, joining us for worship. We saw an increase in folks coming to the church with needs related to flooding and housing crises. We were able to help some of these folks with gear, car batteries, food, support in seeking housing, employment, and referrals for mental health care. The summer months were busier than usual with planning special services, meeting with families and couples, and with organizing a good amount of the BBQ.

In late summer/early fall I took a fabulous leadership training online through Luther Seminary ('Daring to Lead') which focused on communication, vulnerability, values & courage. I will continue to utilize this training and my learnings from it in leadership, ministry, inner work as well as community and communication dynamics moving forward.

I have served on the MRV Interfaith Council and Board of Directors for five years now. The BOD primarily focused on creating a budget and addressing our need to increase fundraising. I support online advertising and communications on FPP and Facebook. I was once again the intake person for emergency assistance requests for the Interfaith Council and for the church. I am incredibly grateful to Rev. Mark Wilson and Sandra Brodeur who will cover these roles during my sabbatical time.

This was my second year serving on the Board of Directors for the VT Conference, and I have been an active participant in the restart of the Washington Association, attending general meetings and clergy gatherings. I joined a new monthly clergy group through the VT Conference facilitated by Associate Conference Minister, Paul Sangree, in the fall. I continue to volunteer with and engage in professional trainings through the Montpelier Community Justice Center with a focus on Restorative Justice and this year, Racial Literacy.

I have spent a significant amount of time preparing for the sabbatical period this year, which included putting together descriptions of tasks for a Part-time Pastor and the congregation in terms of Lay Leadership support. I created a Contact Information Resource for the congregation, so that everyone has access and is informed as to who is doing what and how to get in touch with folks. I have created a variety of resources for specific leadership tasks and teams and have provided support and resources for the Sabbatical Pastor. I am grateful for everyone who is willing to serve in so many ways during the next three months!

We are incredibly fortunate to have Pastor Doug Cameron willing to serve as Sabbatical Pastor. Once the PRC met with him, we were hopeful and prayerful that he would say yes, and he did! It was worth all our time and effort this past year knowing the church will be in good hands and that Pastor Doug and the congregation will be well supported during the three months beginning on Sunday, January 7. The PRC, Deacons, Council and congregation are ready and willing to serve one another, and I am very much looking forward to this time of rest, reconnection, and renewal. I wish you well in these months ahead and look forward to returning in the spring. God bless you, all!

In faith,

Rev. Erin

## Moderator's Annual Report

At the beginning of my second year as Moderator of the Warren United Church, I am profoundly grateful for the members and friends who do the work of our mission statement – to welcome, love, and share – and the individual and group collaborations that have helped us make our way through the post–covid period.

We continue to focus on how we can best meet the needs of our church family and our greater community, both local and beyond.

The Long-Term Planning group has met regularly since last February. The committee's recommendations, reflective of the church's mission statement are: the need for improved community involvement, a focus on integrating all church participants into the full life of the worship community, and improving the accessibility of the church.

As I finish this report on December 31, Reverend Erin begins her first sabbatical time. She has worked hard to organize her time away – both for herself and for her worship team. Next Sunday we will welcome Pastor Doug Cameron to our pulpit, and we are excited to share worship with him through Easter.

The Warren Church continues to share a cordial and collegial relationship with the Waitsfield United Church of Christ, working together on shared services and pop-up events. The summer picnic and the recent Christmas service both demonstrate opportunities to work together with respect and collaboration.

Committee reports in the Annual Report reflect the thoughtful consideration and hard work of the members. Please read them with thanks for their efforts and thoughts about how each of you might contribute to their efforts.

Financial planning will be a focus in 2024 as we continue to strive for a healthy balance in the use of congregational support and the monies in the Emma Ford Fund.

In 2023, we hosted baptisms and weddings – always meaningful and celebratory occasions. And we also said farewell to three longtime members of our church family – Leon Bruno, Wayne Kathan, and Ginny Roth. As we remember these beloved friends, let us reflect on their many contributions to Warren Church and strive to follow their gracious sharing of their time and talents.

Freddie Mahlmann  
Moderator



## Long Term Planning Committee

### Our Church: Where are we going from here?

Three initial project recommendations from the Long Term Planning committee to revitalize and grow the church that are embodied in our mission statement: *“We welcome people as they are, Share Jesus as He is, and Serve the community with love”*.

1. A need for better community engagement - Reaching out to the Warren and Valley communities to form deeper connections, become more aware of our neighbors’ needs, and find new ways to *Serve the community with love*. How can the church share the Good News and best support the good works others do through partnerships or other ways? Various ideas have been suggested, such as: 1) helping support the libraries by underwriting the purchase of books for an upcoming parents discussion, 2) maximizing the use of Emma Ford mission money locally, and 3) better publicizing our role in the community and the availability of our building.

2. Accessibility (*We welcome people as they are*) - In recognition of various human needs and differences make the church as physically accessible and welcoming as possible. For example, there needs to be more open space in the front of the church and additional seating options. We will need professional help to design and implement any major changes.

3. How to best integrate new people into the church (*We welcome people as they are, Share Jesus as He is*) - Church membership has been a requirement for taking part in some committees and leadership positions in the church. People need to feel welcome here and we should encourage everyone’s worship and participation in all aspects of the church community.

In light of the desire of some non-members to become more involved in the church, the following is recommended to take effect on a trial basis for 2024: Participation in the life of the church, including committee and board positions, for the term of those positions, shall be encouraged for all who participate in the church community without regard to formal membership. In order to allow one to more easily and fully participate in the life of the church community it should be more about intentions and what is in one’s heart rather than formal membership in the institution. Consistent with our Mission Statement, we should welcome into a meaningful relationship anyone who desires to participate into community in the Body of Christ and will covenant to embrace the principles in our Mission Statement. For the long term, this needs more time and deeper reflection to find the right process for our community that everyone is comfortable with.

The Long-Term Planning Committee

*Prepared for October 22, 2023 Congregational Meeting*

## Mission Committee Annual Report

Over the course of the past year, Missions served our communities with love through the following offerings, initiatives and nonprofits:

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Ministerial Fund Replenishment	\$16,000
Student Scholarships	8,500
VT UCC Conference	8,000
Doctor's Without Borders	7,000
Mosaic	5,000
MRV Interfaith Council	3,000
Warren Town Pavilion	3,000
Waitsfield Telecom Giving Tree	1,500
Neighbors in Need	1,500
Good Samaritan Haven	1,000
VT Home & Hospice	1,000
Hannah's House	1,000
MRV Senior Center	500
Spectrum Youth Services	500
Elevate	500
Good Beginnings	500
Christmas Fund	500
Montpelier Gospel Choir	500
Strengthen the Church	500
<b>TOTAL DISBURSED</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>

In addition to the financial support provided to these organizations over the course of the year, Missions helped support various church activities – from the organization of Service Sunday volunteer opportunities to the cooking, serving and planning associated with the annual BBQ – Missions has indeed been busy. Beyond just the ‘doing’ though, the group has also been considering what other opportunities might exist for expanding the Church’s mission reach further into our community. This work is both in support of the church’s broader efforts to have better visibility within the community but to also explore how to best leverage the Mission’s Committee to support other fundraising/mission efforts in the community, whether this be through utilization of the church space, providing financial support to provide seeds for broader initiatives, or rising to the challenge of supporting any other exciting new opportunities that may arise in the coming year.

## Pastoral Relations Committee Report

The Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) was very active in 2023, meeting at least once a month, mostly in preparation for Erin's sabbatical. The PRC worked closely with Erin to develop the Sabbatical Pastor job description to be listed with the Conference. The Committee interviewed and hired Pastor Doug Cameron to serve our church from January 7 to April 7, 2024. PRC also assisted Erin in developing the coverage plan for what duties Pastor Cameron would cover and what duties would be covered by congregation members while she is on sabbatical.

In addition, the PRC developed and administered a Pastoral and Congregational Survey during the fall. The Committee tabulated and shared the results with Erin in December. Those findings will be shared with the congregation in the first quarter of 2024.

We are here to facilitate open communications between the Pastor and Congregation, so please feel free to reach out to us anytime!

With blessings,  
Freddie Mahlmann  
Sandra Brodeur  
Susan Cumiskey

## Rebecca Peatman Scholarship Annual Report

The Warren United Church has established a scholarship in memory of life-long member Rebecca Peatman, who was active in the Warren Church and the Mad River Valley community in many capacities.

Rebecca believed in the value of education, and recognized the financial challenge faced by many young people and their families. Providing a scholarship to a local student honors Rebecca's memory for many years to come. Her wish was to help a student who has financial need, and has demonstrated initiatives that result in positive outcomes for the community. The Rebecca Peatman Scholarship is a four-year scholarship, open to non-traditional students, as well as high school seniors, who are residents of the Mad River Valley.

In 2023 this scholarship was awarded to Amy Cook of Waitsfield, an outstanding student from Harwood Union High School. Amy is studying Nutrition and Food Sciences at the University of Vermont.

The Rebecca Peatman Scholarship Committee

Jada Munro

Fran Plewak

Nancy Rhodes

Susan Stoehr

## Stewardship Report

Once again our generous congregation rose to the occasion to provide much needed financial support for the church which allowed us to reach our goal.

The results of this year's campaign are summarized below:

Range	# of Pledges	
\$1 - 100	1	<b>Total Pledged: \$50,116</b>
\$101 - 500	2	
\$501 - 1,000	4	<b>Average Pledge: \$2,278</b>
\$1,001 – 2,500	7	
\$2,501 – 5,000	6	
\$5,001+	2	

Thank you all for your generosity!

Stewardship Team

Bob Cummiskey, Doug Stoehr, Peggy Johnson, Rev. Erin Reardon, and John Donaldson

## Music Committee

~ DEDICATION ~

*It is with deep and heart wrenching sadness that we say goodbye to our beloved Virginia Roth, who served the Warren United Church for the better part of a half century. Ginny held multiple positions on committees over the years, but her commitment and dedication to the music ministry of the church was unwavering and unparalleled.*

*Ginny loved music, she DEEPLY loved this church, and she loved the many people that were touched by her music. We are blessed and grateful to have had her musical influence and contributions these many years. May we continue her commitment and dedication to beautiful music in this space, in her honor.*

- Music has continued throughout the year at the Warren United Church in many ways and is an integral part of our worship experiences.
- Carey primarily offers music accompaniment each Sunday, with occasional fill-in by our own Amelia Allen. Our worship services were enhanced by soloists, duets, and choir pieces during the year. Don and Nancy, the Cummiskey's, Asa McDonald, Doug Stoehr, Becky Robinson, and Frankie Bennett offered anthems and special music on various occasions.
- Multiple memorial services and weddings were held in 2023 with music provided by Carey Bennett, one memorial by Joan Foster.
- Hopefully, a new tradition of caroling began in December with seven carolers singing at different homes of beloved church members.
- A Christmas Pageant re-emerged on December 17 with many young ones participating. Asa McDonald brought special music.
- The Warren Church, with its lovely sanctuary and wonderful acoustics, hosted several concerts over the year, including David Feurzeig's "Play Every Town," Scrag Mountain, and the VSO/Counterpoint. These concerts were well attended and enjoyed by all.
- Several musicians and singers offered beautiful music to the Christmas Eve service. Many thanks to the Cummiskey's, Carolyn Adams, Amelia Allen and the choir for their lovely and well received music.

- Extensive work was done on the Steinway piano in August and September that included replacement of hammers, shanks, removing and replacing punchings, buttons/dowels, cleaning, lubricating, aligning, regulating the action, and tuning the piano. It now has a much richer, clearer tone with much less “tinniness.” The work was done by Tom McNeil of VT Piano Restorations. The piano should be in good shape for the next 60 years, except for occasional tuning. An in-piano humidification system may be purchased in the future to help the piano hold a tune. The total cost of the work was \$3,986.

Respectfully Submitted

The Warren United Church of Christ Music Committee  
Virginia Roth, Bob Cumiskey, Erin Reardon and Carey Bennett

## Deacon's Annual Report

Throughout 2023, the Deacons were involved in worship planning and worship participation (including serving as Greeters with Bev and serving communion with Rev. Erin). The Deacons were involved in several special worship services this year:

- Presented a Missions-focused series in the spring, highlighting how our church members serve the community beyond what they do under the “church umbrella”. Several people offered brief overviews about their personal volunteer work.
- Designed and delivered a service focused on Mental Health Awareness on October 15. Don’s granddaughter, Emi, was our featured speaker. Emi was unable to make it in person due to illness, but Don delivered what she had prepared on her behalf. It was a powerful service, including special music, information from Hannah’s House and congregational sharing.
- Developed a “Gratitude Service” for the Sunday before Thanksgiving (11/19).
- Honored Reverend Erin on November 26th in recognition of her 5-year anniversary as our Settled Pastor. Doug Stoehr offered words of appreciation, Carey selected Erin’s favorite hymns, and the Deacons presented a special gift with notes from the congregation. And of course, we had cake too!
- Assisted in planning the “Pop Up Pageant” for the December 17 service. It was a joy to have so many children back in our midst!

Some of the Deacons participated in the Vermont Conference Vitality Training in March, along with Rev. Erin and other congregation members.

We hosted a “Newcomers Information Meeting” in September to welcome folks who are new or attend regularly but haven’t joined the church yet.

Alongside the pastor, Deacons support the needs of the congregation through prayer, visits, check-ins, etc. We also provide coverage for the congregation during weeks when Erin takes time off.

Deacons, in conjunction with the Trustees, are the approving body for the Emma Ford Fund and attend meetings twice a year with the Church Treasurer.

Deacons are preparing to fill various roles in support of the congregation and our sabbatical pastor while Erin is on sabbatical during the first quarter of 2024.

Faithfully,  
Your Deacon Team

Brent Adams, Susan Cummiskey, Heather Morehouse, Fran Plewak & Don Rhoades



## Trustee's Annual Report

The following property related activities took place during 2023:

1. Our 23-year-old furnace was in need of replacement. This took place in April and there is a improvement in efficiency, reliability, and noise. We are able to set the temperature remotely.
2. Both bath windows were replaced. Nice to be able to open and close in the conventional manner!
3. Playground rubber pellets were purchased and spread. The playground continues to serve many kids in the community.
4. We were not able to get the front stairs and landing replaced due to contractor scheduling. Now planned for the spring. The current railings were reinforced in the meantime.
5. Four fire extinguishers were replaced. A smoke alarm was relocated in the sanctuary.
6. The Vermont Preservation Trust performed a technical survey of the church in November and noted that the general condition of the church is well maintained.

The following recommendations were made:

- a. Possible deterioration over time of 2-3 posts in under sanctuary that support the main floor. Recommendation to cut 12"-18" off posts and seat on solid concrete blocks (Cost estimate: \$2500-\$3000).
- b. Two sanctuary storm windows show rot and water infiltration. Need to be removed and repaired. (Cost estimate: \$3000-\$3500).
- c. Small roof above front doors drain directly below onto entry. Redirect drainage to one side. Front entry pilasters need minor repair. (Cost estimate: \$5000-\$10,000).
- d. Balustrade above entry shows noticeable staining. Needs evaluation and repair. Note that access is very difficult. (Cost estimate: \$5000-\$9000).
- e. Cherry front doors are an important part of the historic fabric of the church. They need restoration to fit properly and eliminate sticking. Problem may be caused by water splash from small roof drainage. (Cost estimate: \$2500-\$3000).

The trustees had already identified that the balustrade was in need of repair. Other recommendations will be prioritized and addressed as budget permits.

Thanks to those who faithfully clean and shovel during the year.

Finally, we thank Jake Rivers for his service and knowledge over 2 terms.

2023 Trustees

John Donaldson, Jake Rivers, Doug Stoehr

# Treasurer's Report

## 2023 Financial Results

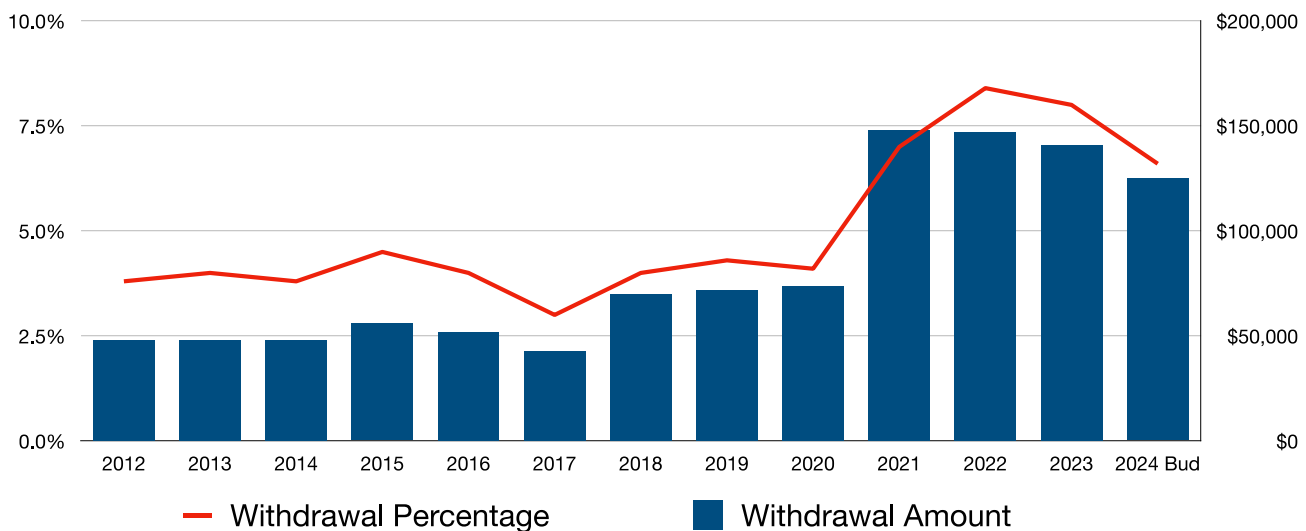
The Church continues to meet all its financial obligations and was once again able to stay within our overall proposed budget deficit even though our Congregational Income categories fell short. Some Congregants did not fulfill their Pledged amounts and the Sunday Plate total was less than anticipated. This was somewhat mitigated by other Income categories of "Donations" and "Building Use" receipts being higher than budgeted and all expense categories ending well under their expected amounts. In addition, several Building projects were delayed until 2024. These results allowed the Church to withdraw less than the originally budgeted amount from the Emma Ford Endowment fund. Ultimately only 7.4% of the average balance was withdrawn as opposed to the budgeted amount of 8%.

## Emma Ford Endowment Performance

We were also fortunate to have the investments within the endowment perform well allowing us to experience a net increase of 15%. However, the balance is still down 10% from our 2021 peak due to below average market performance in previous years and a significant increase in withdrawals to support our budget.

While for most of the life of the endowment, we limited the amount we withdrew from the fund to between 4% - 5% of the balance, we significantly increased that amount to closer to 8% in recent years.

### Emma Ford Withdrawal Amounts

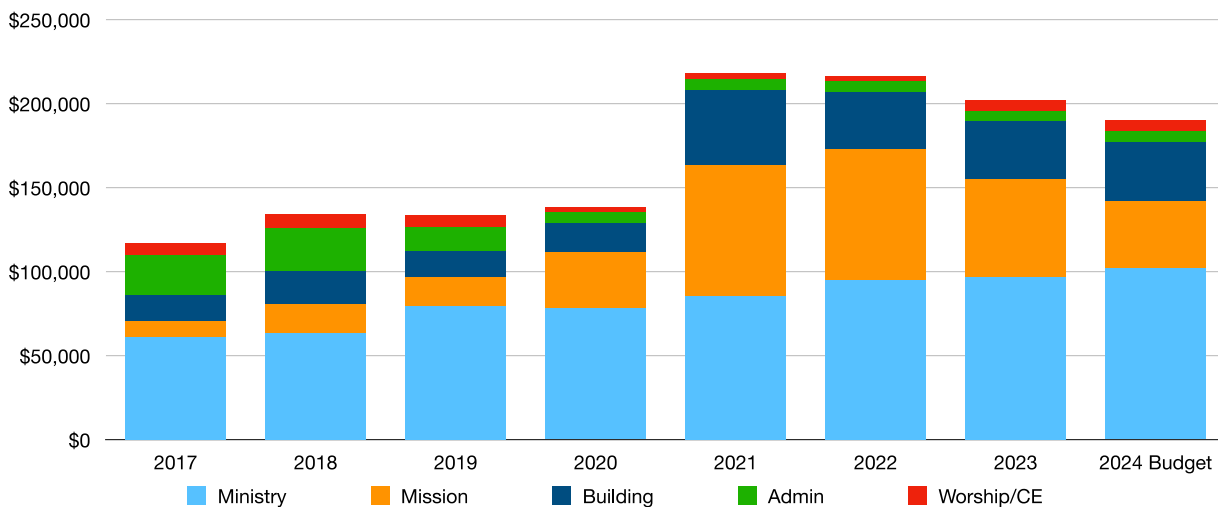


This level of withdrawals will ultimately drain the balance of the fund that we rely on for the continued operation of the Church. An analysis by the Fidelity Investments Retirement Tool projects at this level of withdrawals the fund will be extinguished in 10–20 years depending on market conditions. Only by reducing our withdrawal rate to below 5.5% can we ensure the long-term survival of the endowment with some amount of growth to compensate for inflation.

**2024 Proposed Budget**

The budget proposed for 2024 reduces overall expenses by approximately 10% in an attempt to preserve the life of the fund. The budget; however, is still well above pre-pandemic levels and fails to reach a rate that would ensure the future availability of the endowment. Reductions in Building Improvements and outgoing Mission Donations and have reduced our withdrawal rate to approximately 6.5%, which is still higher than recommended for the longevity of the endowment.

**Historical Budget Components**



Endowment resources are not simply a luxury we enjoy but a critical element of the ongoing existence of the Church. The Congregation provided funds that support less than 30% of the budget in 2023 and have consistently declined over the years. Without the endowment we could not employ a full-time Pastor and maintain the building let alone provide any support for outside organizations.

I believe Church Council and the Congregation understands the need to move to a more sustainable withdrawal rate and strongly encourage them to progress with greater urgency.

In your service,

Bob Cummiskey,  
Treasurer

## Auditor's Report

I have examined the Church Treasurer's books and records and have determined that:

1. Appropriate financial controls are in place, and
2. The Year End Financial Statements fairly and accurately represent the financial position of the Church and the results of its operations for 2023.

John Donaldson  
Auditor

## 2024 Proposed Budget

	<b>2023 Actual</b>	<b>2023 Budget</b>	<b>2024 Budget</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	<i>7.4%</i>	<i>8.0%</i>	<i>6.6%</i>	
<b>Endowment Withdrawal (Rate)</b>	\$139,103	\$150,900	\$125,000	(\$25,900)
<b>Church Congregation</b>				
Pledged Income	\$47,537	\$49,000	\$50,000	\$1,000
Church Plate	11,782	13,000	11,000	(2,000)
<b>Total Church Congregation</b>	\$59,319	\$62,000	\$61,000	(\$1,000)
<b>Other Income</b>	3,412	2,000	5,000	3,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$201,834</b>	<b>\$214,900</b>	<b>\$191,000</b>	<b>(\$23,900)</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
<b>Ministry</b>				
Payroll Expenses	\$43,346	\$44,000	\$46,000	\$2,000
Housing	17,341	18,000	18,000	0
Health Insurance	19,755	24,000	22,000	(2,000)
Annuity	7,952	8,700	9,000	300
Social Security	4,552	4,700	5,000	300
Life & Disability	836	1,000	1,000	0
Professional Development	995	1,500	1,500	0
Mileage & Meals	77	1,000	500	(500)
Sabbatical	2,000	2,000	0	(2,000)
<b>Total Ministry</b>	\$96,854	\$104,900	\$103,000	(\$1,900)
<b>Mission</b>				
Mission Discretionary	\$22,000	\$23,000	\$12,000	(\$11,000)
Scholarships	8,500	9,000	9,000	0
Ministerial Fund	16,000	15,000	10,000	(5,000)
Conference Support	7,000	7,000	5,000	(2,000)
Interfaith Council	3,000	3,000	3,000	0
UCC per capita	1,025	1,000	1,000	0
<b>Total Mission</b>	\$57,525	\$58,000	\$40,000	(\$18,000)

<b>Building</b>				
Utilities	\$6,512	\$7,500	\$7,000	(\$500)
Insurance	10,091	11,500	8,000	(3,500)
Maintenance & Repairs	20,000	20,000	20,000	0
<b>Total Building</b>	<b>\$36,603</b>	<b>\$39,000</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>	<b>(\$4,000)</b>
<b>Administration</b>				
Payroll Expenses	\$2,134	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$0
Fellowship	547	500	1,000	500
Office Supplies	1,492	2,000	2,000	0
Workers' Comp Insurance	673	1,500	1,000	(500)
<b>Total Administration</b>	<b>\$4,846</b>	<b>\$6,000</b>	<b>\$6,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Worship</b>				
Music Service	\$5,263	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$0
Flowers & Supplies	530	1,000	1,000	0
Guest Worship Leaders	40	500	500	0
Christian Education	173	500	500	0
<b>Total Worship</b>	<b>\$6,006</b>	<b>\$7,000</b>	<b>\$7,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$201,834</b>	<b>\$214,900</b>	<b>\$191,000</b>	<b>(\$23,900)</b>
<b>Surplus (Deficit) from Operations</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>

## Balance Sheet Years Ended December 31

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Investment Accounts	\$2,029,406	\$1,761,016
Bank Accounts	38,583	47,188
Other	1,451	1,451
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<u>\$2,069,440</u>	<u>\$1,809,655</u>
<b>Accounts Receivable</b>	<b>(\$5,520)</b>	<b>(\$4,810)</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<u><b>\$2,063,920</b></u>	<u><b>\$1,804,845</b></u>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	\$364	\$4,232
<b>Long Term Liabilities</b>		
Building Reserve Fund	\$32,088	\$24,574
Accrued Pastor Sabbatical	10,000	8,000
Ministerial Fund	6,567	4,205
Youth Group	3,252	3,252
Sue Simms Camperships	1,503	1,503
Music Scholarships	390	390
<b>Total Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<u>\$53,800</u>	<u>\$41,924</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<u>\$54,164</u>	<u>\$46,156</u>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Retained Earnings	\$2,148,579	\$1,906,386
Net Income	(138,823)	(147,697)
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<u>\$2,009,756</u>	<u>\$1,758,689</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<u><b>\$2,063,920</b></u>	<u><b>\$1,804,845</b></u>

## Fund Disbursements

### 2023 Mission Disbursements

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Ministerial Fund Replenishment	\$16,000
Student Scholarships	8,500
VT UCC Conference	8,000
Doctor's Without Borders	7,000
Mosaic	5,000
MRV Interfaith Council	3,000
Warren Town Pavilion	3,000
Waitsfield Telecom Giving Tree	1,500
Neighbors in Need	1,500
Good Samaritan Haven	1,000
VT Home & Hospice	1,000
Hannah's House	1,000
MRV Senior Center	500
Spectrum Youth Services	500
Elevate	500
Good Beginnings	500
Christmas Fund	500
Montpelier Gospel Choir	500
Strengthen the Church	500
<b>TOTAL DISBURSED</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>

### 2023 Ministerial Fund Disbursement Detail

<b>Category</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Grocery/Gift Cards	\$3,883
Utilities	2,440
Rent	2,340
Auto Repair	2,280
Funeral Services	500
Other	395
<b>TOTAL DISBURSED</b>	<b>\$11,838</b>