



Growing Through Change

Annual Report

2024

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LEADERSHIP REPORTS

Message from Kenji...

Through another year where homeless and unhoused dominated Sarnia headlines, Grace United Church continued to uplift the efforts of agencies and organizations working to address the issues: hosting an information session for Indwell, participating in an ecumenical worship service, designating Nightlight as a recipient of Soup Luncheon funds, and supporting the work of educating and animating community support.

Given the well-publicized difficulties of acquiring affordable housing, I report with acute irony and self-consciousness that my relocation to the Greater Sarnia Area, and the corresponding transactions of home sale and purchase, proceeded smoothly and with relative ease. More difficult has been the emotional transition; grieving the loss of connections from our previous home of 17 years in Strathroy but my partner, Shelley, and I finding are finding the new places and people – local businesses, service providers, neighbours – that create a space of belonging. Just like church: less about the building and more about the spirit of the people within and around.

Over the past year, I have been blessed to work with a wonderful staff team. I remain grateful for the spirit, expertise, openness, and energy of Lori Armstrong, Kathy Dodkin, Pat Morrison, Marque Smith, and Curtis Dixon. I also extend appreciation and thanks for the committees and volunteers that I've worked with throughout the year; the strength of Grace is found in its lay leadership.

Grateful for all who make this community of faith a spiritual home,
Kenji

Message from Pat...

In my quest to understand what ails our young people in this day, I've discovered many things, I'd say many *truths*, about this cultural

moment in which we live. I have been convicted as I discover the ways in which I am formed by the tenets of what Charles Taylor refers to as the 'secular age.' One of the markers of 'secularity', according to Taylor, is that public space is increasingly emptied of Christian language, rituals, traditions, and imagery. Moreover, Christian practices, even ministerial imagination, is increasingly formed by something other than the Christian tradition. I have participated in this. And I find forgiveness for it.

I've discovered that there are words and practices from our tradition that matter. These words and practices matter for this moment. There are ancient practices that we have lost sight of or let go of. Historically, these Christian practices were adopted because they were found to be true, delivering developmental nutrients into our lives, answering the needs of the human heart, and bringing healing to the world. Out of the richness of our tradition we are gifted with words like discernment and revelation. Once understood and practiced, discernment and revelation hinge on the belief that when we assume a particular posture we are able to hear the world speak. We become attuned to our God who speaks beauty and health and healing and hope and clarity into our living moments.

Some of these words, these concepts, these practices are hard to understand outside of lived experience. They don't seem to make intuitive sense in a secular age. So, our youth set themselves to the Christian practice of discernment with an eye for revelation. They developed a ritual that answers the human need for resonance. Their 'bell ritual' opens participants to hear the world speak.

Recently, I asked parishioners to name what has been revealed to them over the past eight months as they have participated in the bell ritual. Unanimously, in varied language, everyone pointed to the beauty that unfolds when the 'other' is revealed. In varied language, people narrated a sense of belonging to others around the circle, belonging to the Grace community, and belonging to God.

Moving forward, I think our watchword has something to do with *belonging*. As we read through this report, I invite you to do so through the lens of *belonging*. As we move into the year ahead, I invite you to watch for those moments where *belonging* is nurtured here at Grace, and to listen for when it is narrated and confessed. As we continue the faithful work of living out God's call on our lives—collectively and individually—my hope is that we set ourselves to the work of discernment with an eye for revelation that comes from the Spirit.

Pat

Message from the Outgoing Chair of Council...

James 2:26, in part, reads “faith without works is dead.” Faith is not blind; true faith is actionable trust. Faith is having strong evidence for a belief and putting your confidence in it. James emphasizes that genuine faith is demonstrated through practical works and righteous living.

Grace revealed its faith in action throughout 2024, both as a congregation and as individuals, by the activities pursued with reference to time, talent, and treasures. Whether through an annual donation of 1500 pounds of food or cooking (and serving) meals to 100+ people at The Inn of the Good Shepherd every fourth Wednesday of the month, we helped those less fortunate. Our Soup Luncheons supported organizations like the Brain Injury Association (\$1790), Lambton Centre (\$1890), Canadian Food Grains Bank (\$2340), Nightlight (\$1625), Rayjon (\$2485) and Habitat for Humanity (\$2065). On communion Sundays, we supplemented the Benevolent Fund which helps those requiring emergency funds. Further activities included the pancake supper, Circles Dinner, the Spirit of Jazz worship service, Christmas Giving Tree, and the Fall Fair. Through ongoing community events, we reached out to our neighbours by providing space for The Bluewater Chamber Choir, Community Living, Guiding, Scouts, and PFLAG. Please read all the

committee reports highlighting their continuing work, as they affect the community at large, as well as the Grace family. These efforts included the Family Retreat, soup making, visiting or telephoning the homes of those who can't get around, sending cards to post-secondary students, decorating the sanctuary, acting as AV techs, and the youth bell ringing after Sunday service ... to name a few!

Individually, we demonstrate our faith through the work we do around Grace such as volunteering on committees and keeping people in prayer. In the community, we have reached out through volunteering and interacting with others by shovelling snow, giving rides to appointments, lending a listening ear, sitting on community boards, or serving on council.

Many thanks to Lori Armstrong, who retired in April after 26 years as office administrator! Kathy Dodkin, our new office administrator, joins the staff team of: Curtis Dixon, custodian; Marque Smith, music director; and Reverends Kenji Marui and Pat Morrison.

Without their constant support, the life and events of Grace would not run smoothly.

Special thanks to Leslie Veldman and Pete Melanson who will be retiring from Church Council. Thank you to all who have served or are serving on the various committees, contributing in your own way to the worship and work of our faith community. Without out your support, Grace would not be able to maintain our quality of worship, physical assets, and programs as we reach out to those around us.

This past year, we emerged from COVID with new vibrant perspectives on how to express our faith as shown in our ever-adapting changes in worship, programming, community outreach. The United Church of Canada speaks of inspiring, inviting and thanking the people around us – in church and the broader community. As Grace, we forge ahead into 2025 with these concepts in the forefront of our minds.

Thank you for a progressive 2024!
Marion Staples, Chair of Church Council

Message from the Incoming Chair of Council...

Seeds of Curiosity

I would not be the incoming chair were it not for an invitation. I was asked by Leslie Veldman and Al Shaw if I would consider joining the council and becoming the vice chair. These invitations, as they invariably do, led to curiosity. Once I had an invite, I had a drive to find out more. I wanted to know what the role was, what the responsibilities were, what the commitment was and most importantly what value the role brings to the congregation. While these questions could be readily answered in a few words, the real story unfolded through the experiences within the church and with the congregation over the last year.

Throughout the year I learned a lot about how things come to be in our church community and the dedication and commitment from members to bring them to life. I was privileged to learn the role of executive chair under Marion's guidance. As she guided the council, led events, facilitated information and supported many church endeavours. I am very grateful to have such a teacher.

This year, I'm hoping to inspire curiosity in our members. Curiosity for faith, curiosity toward each other and curiosity towards our community. Through invitations, I'm hoping seeds of curiosity can be planted about what we love about Grace, and how we can all be a part of the magic that is captured year in and year out for our members and families. I want to inspire members to ask questions and seek answers, to be called and to explore. To invite one another to the programming we are embracing and finding value in.

To foster seeds of curiosity is to bring a spotlight to the ideas and workings that happen everyday in our community. We have had a lot

of wonderful initiatives, great changes and many more ideas that haven't come to fruition over the last few years. Further, our church is rooted in tradition and faith which also offers more than we can imagine. Let's get curious about what the message of God is for us in these times and what that might call us to do.

To bring curiosity isn't to blindly accept all things. It is to seek to understand. We can understand our community, each other and our faith at deeper levels when we invite each other to participate, explore, challenge and embrace what Grace offers.

Let's make this year a year of curiosity. Let's invite our friends and family to see what this community of Christ is all about. Let's challenge our congregation to support one another and grow together. Let's look to the Lord and the Bible and take hold of some of this ancient wisdom that is there for us. Let's bring and share the love of Christ. Let's see where our curiosity takes us.

Tory [Walko]

2024 ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA

GRACE UNITED CHURCH

SUNDAY March 2, 2025

12:00 pm in the Sanctuary after soup luncheon

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86578843100>

1. Opening Prayer
2. Constitution of the Annual Congregational Meeting
3. Motion to allow adherents to vote on financial and administrative matters
4. Approval of Agenda
5. Approval of Minutes
 - a. Minutes of Annual congregational Meeting held February 11, 2024
 - b. Minutes of Congregational Meeting held April 7, 2024
6. Approval of 2024 Annual Reports of Council, Committees, Groups, and of the Financial Review Committee, excluding Finance and Nominating Committees
7. Approval of Financial Committee Reports
 - a. Review and approval of 2024 Financial Report
 - b. Review and approval of 2025 Budget Proposal
8. Nominating Committee Report
 - a. Removal and Election of Trustees
 - b. Appointment of Financial Review Committee for 2025
 - c. Election of Officers

d. Election of **Governing Body**

9. **New Business**

10. Introduction of Incoming **Chair**

11. **Appreciations**

12. **Adjournment**

13. **Closing Prayer**

Minutes Annual Congregational Meeting...

Grace United Church

Sunday February 11, 2024

The Meeting was held at Grace United Church in the Sanctuary and via Zoom.

Having achieved a quorum, the Meeting began at 12:01 pm.

Chairperson: Leslie Veldman, Chair of Council; Secretary: Cecily Chiles.

Opening Prayer

Pat Morrison

Constitution of the Annual Congregational Meeting

There were 45 participants in person and 1 Zoom screen, with quorum. A procedure was described for casting a personal vote on Zoom.

Motion to allow adherents to vote on all matters

No adherents of Grace United church identified themselves, no motion was made.

Approval of the Agenda

MOTION to approve the agenda as printed in the 2023 Annual Report [moved by Gord Walkling/seconded by Bryce McGarvey].

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Approval of the Minutes

Minutes of the Annual congregational Meeting held on Sunday, February 12, 2023

MOTION to approve the minutes from February 12, 2023, Annual Congregational Meeting. [Al McLean/John Cooke]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Approval of the 2023 Annual Reports of Council, Committees, Groups and of the Financial Review Committee, excluding Finance and Nominating Committees.

MOTION to receive the 2023 reports. [David Murray/Al Shaw]

Discussion:

- Leslie Veldman reports that a financial review was conducted of the records for the calendar year 2023 by Laura Black and Gord Walkling. A report by the Financial Review Team will be presented at the March 2024 meeting of Council.
- Summary of findings: The Financial Review team found the books to be in order and approves the accuracy and integrity that the financial team exercised in supporting this aspect of Grace's governance structure in 2023. Thank you to members of the Finance committee for their excellent work. Financial review team members are available today to answer questions.

Motion carried.

Approval of the 2023 Annual Reports

MOTION to approve the 2023 reports, excluding Finance and Nominating Committee. [Joanna Catterson/Marion Staples]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Approval of Finance Committee Reports

Review and approval of the 2023 Financial Report

2023 Financial Results were presented by Paul Cooper

- Deficit (\$18K) was lower than approved 2023 budget (\$24K)
- Rental income (\$42K) and interest income (\$22K) continued strong performance
- Congregation contributions to Outreach initiatives continued to be strong
- Reserve fund was able to support the 2023 deficit
- Givings were below budget in 2023 and lower than in 2022
- Deficit of \$18,285K will be covered by the reserve fund which will bring the reserve fund down to approximately \$43K.

MOTION to approve the 2023 financial report as presented at the meeting. [Bruce Davies/Chris Cooke]

Discussion:

- Numbers shown on the screen differ from those printed in the Annual Report. Those posted on the screen are the official record, the annual report numbers were based on estimates before the final numbers were received.
- Asked for an explanation of the assets with Sarnia Community Foundation. Entitled to withdraw a certain amount every year, growth accrued has been re-invested into the funds in May every year. These funds are designated for specific purposes, Council could decide how to use interest from SCF funds. Legacy fund GIC interest was directed to the operating budget to help balance the budget. Total assets with SCF is approximately \$70K.
- In the Annual Report, page 47, there is an estimate for the legacy fund interest 2023 budgeted, but no actual number reported. Finance proposed a change for the allocation of legacy fund interest to support the operating budget and reduce a large projected deficit. Previously, legacy fund interest remained in the legacy fund. It was shown as a separate line item in the proposed 2023 budget to ensure the proposed change was profiled. In subsequent views, all interest – legacy fund plus ongoing RBC money market interest – was consolidated in one line.
- Interest in 2023, line in table on page 47 of Annual Report, where does the interest reported come from? Primarily from Legacy fund interest and from some the Money Market fund. Special funds are all invested together, including a Money Market fund. These special funds are shown as a single line reported as 2023 Interest. The decision of Council was for all interest to go towards the Operating budget.

Motion carried.

Review and approval of the 2024 Budget Proposal
2024 Budget Proposal, presented by Paul Cooper

- 2024 forecasted to be a challenging year. Striving for a balance between costs and income with the desire to have a balanced budget.
- Significant increases in specific cost areas (e.g. Salaries at 6.3% and insurance at 15%)
- Proposed budget balances need to reduce/eliminate deficit while funding priority ministries, an example is maintaining or increasing committee budgets
- 2024 budget deficit proposed at approximately \$13K
- Budget includes a 5% increase in givings versus 2023 actual (this has been achieved in the past). This is a challenge for the congregation
- Congregation support is required to enhance special events (\$5000)
- Manse rental has increased to \$500/month
- Other revenue increase or cost reduction items are included in the proposed budget
- Commitment to M&S in 2024 was reduced to \$7000
- The proposed deficit of approximately \$13K can be partly covered by the Reserve fund, the remaining deficit would be covered by the Legacy fund. Council to review the question of what the minimum balance for the Reserve fund should be.

MOTION to approve the 2024 budget as presented with proposed deficit of approximately \$13,000 [Bryce McGarvey/Jim Wicks]

Discussion:

- Concern was expressed that contributions to M&S are reduced in the operating budget. Suggested that the M&S line be replaced on the envelopes so that members can direct contributions to M&S. Recommended that the congregation be advised of the change in contributions to M&S. Encouraged people to go the M&S website and review how those funds are used. Paul Cooper suggested a follow-up on this discussion at Council regarding contributions to M&S. Directed donations to M&S can still be made using the envelopes.
- Asked for clarification whether the speaker was recommending that a dedicated M&S donation option be put back on the

envelopes. Ensure that members know that they can donate directly to M&S through the envelopes, and through the office and directly through the United Church of Canada. Ensure that the congregation is made aware of the change in how contributions to M&S are made and how members can make directed contributions.

- Special appeal events for M&S happen at Grace 2–3 times every year. Those funds go directly towards M&S in addition to the proposed amount in the 2024 operating budget. Members may contribute additional funds at the time of those events.
- In the Annual report, Outreach Committee report, page 49, lists what was given to M&S during the specific appeals events in 2023.
- Is there any discussion on raising rental fees for user groups in the church? There have been some discussions, but no decisions have been made.

Motion carried with 2 abstentions.

Costs and Revenues Review

Jim Wicks gave a visual presentation to help the congregation understand the costs and revenues associated with Grace United Church. Opportunities for members of our faith community to help Grace achieve a balanced budget were discussed; these included participating in fund-raising special events, inviting new members, personal givings.

Discussion:

- It was recommended that a version of this presentation be made available to everyone in the congregation. Emphasize the points of actions that members can take. A recorded video of the presentation will be made available through the website.

Removal and Election of Trustees

The removal and election of Trustees requires congregational approval.

MOTION to approve the addition of Joanna Catterson to the Board of Trustees [Chris Cooke/Al McLean]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Election of Officers

Al Shaw, chair of Nominations committee, thanked everyone who contributes their time and efforts to the running of Grace United Church. Al Shaw presented officers for 2024 as follows:

- Council Chair: Marion Staples
- Council Vice-Chair: Tory Walko
- Secretary: Cecily Chiles
- Trustees: Joanna Catterson, Bruce Davies, Pete Melanson, Neil Holloway, Ray Phillips, Kenji Marui, Pat Morrison.
- Regional Representatives: vacant
- Treasurer: vacant
- Financial Reviewers: Laura Black, Gord Walkling

MOTION that nominations be closed. [Chris Cooke/Bryce McGarvey]

Discussion:

- Since Treasurer role is not filled, are there legal concerns? Someone else within Finance committee will have to pick up the work in the absence of a Treasurer, or the work will not be done. Council continues to search for a Treasurer.
- Has the current treasurer resigned? No formal resignation has been received by Council. The Treasurer indicated a year ago that he would like to be released from the role in 2024. Council will need to follow-up to confirm who is filling the role of Treasurer.

Motion carried with 1 opposed.

MOTION to approve the slate of nominated candidates for office, as presented. [and granting Council power to add as needed until the next Congregational Meeting] [Ian McGuinness/Jim Wicks]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Election of Governing Body

2024 Council and Council Committee members are listed in the Annual Report 2023.

MOTION that the elected 2024 Council and Council Committee members be those names printed in the 2023 annual report as listed with each committee report, with additions to Christian Development committee to include Margaret Billings and Marilyn Barros [Al Shaw/David Murray].

Discussion:

- Committee members are listed in the annual report. It was pointed out that only one person is listed on the CD committee. Pat Morrison advised that there are 2 who have stepped forward to join the CD committee. Margaret Billings and Marilyn Barros will join the committee.

Motion carried.

Election of Nominations Committee

As the Nominations Committee is an Ad Hoc committee of Council, its membership requires annual appointment.

MOTION to approve the slate of candidates Pat Morrison and Leslie Veldman and granting Council power to add as needed until the next Congregational Meeting [Chris Cooke/John Cooke]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Ministry and Personnel Committee

John Cooke presented the annual staffing appointment on behalf of M&P Committee.

MOTION that Grace UC request Region 7, Antler River Watershed, to extend Pat Morrison's appointment for the period of July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025 [John Cooke / Gord Walkling]- **Discussion: None**

Motion carried.

Introduction of Incoming Chair

Marion Staples introduced herself and gave an outline of this year's theme, **Growing through change**.

Appreciations

Leslie Veldman: The past year the theme has been **Grace** flowing through hope. Leslie thanked the staff, Kenji, Pat, Curtis, Lori and Marque for all they do for the members of **Grace**. Lori, has been a valuable partner to everyone on **Council**; Lori will be missed and we wish you the very best in retirement. Leslie thanked all current and past committee members who have played a vital role in the development of the church. Thanks also to committee workers and volunteers not on committees, you time is a gift and has contributed to many of the successes over this year, including the gym wall, re-starting soup luncheons, youth re-starting **Community Living** dances, the **Resonance** retreat weekend. People are encouraged to join committees and bring new ideas and energy to the work in the church. **Christian Development** welcomed two new members to continue ministry to young people. Thanks to the choir for their leadership in **Worship**. Incoming chair, Marion Staples, thanked Leslie for chairing **Council** through a year of change. Her leadership with teamwork created an encouraging and enjoyable **Council**. Marion thanked Al Shaw for his contributions to **Council** as Vice-chair, Chair and Past Chair.

Meeting closed at 13:10.

Closing Prayer

Pat Morrison

Minutes Congregational Meeting...

Grace United Church

Sunday April 7, 2024

The meeting was held in the **Sanctuary** and via **Zoom** with 75 participants and began at 11:15 am. There was a quorum.

Chairperson: Marion Staples, Chair of Council; Secretary: Cecily Chiles.

Constitution of Special Congregational Meeting

Marion Staples called the special congregational meeting to order.

Opening Prayer

Kenji Marui

Extending a Provisional Call

The purpose of the meeting, as described in the meeting notice, is to consider the question of extending a call. In recognition of Pat Morrison's ministry and following an interview, Pat Morrison has been granted his testamur. Accordingly, Pat is now a candidate to be ordained, as he has indicated his desire to do so. The Congregation is requested to make a "provisional call", meaning "pending admission," in a motion presented to Grace congregation. Following approval by the Congregation, Pat Morrison will be formally admitted and Ordained at the Celebration of Ministry Service during the tri-regional annual meeting, May 24-26.

MOTION to allow adherents to vote [Al McLean/Leslie Veldman]

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

MOTION that Grace United Church extend a provisional call to Pat Morrison toward his ordination in the United Church of Canada which will become effective on the date of his celebration of ministry service [John Cooke / Daphne Murray].

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

John Cooke presented the reasons for the motion and the terms of the call. Pat's position description and responsibilities will remain the same. Pat's salary and allowances will remain unchanged, although he will be administered as an ordained minister. Discussion followed and a few questions were answered.

The chair and congregation offered congratulations to Pat.

Adjournment

MOTION to adjourn [John Cooke / Margaret Billings].

Discussion: None

Motion carried.

Meeting closed at 11:30.

Closing Blessing

Kenji Marui

Council Structure 2024...

Chair	Marion Staples	519 333 7762
Vice Chair	Tory Walko	709 749 4124
Secretary	Cecily Chiles	519 331 1008
Treasurer	Wayne Pease	519 541 1360
Assistant Treasurer	Bob Newman	519 542 9890
Past Chair	Leslie Veldman	613 888 4198
Christian Development	C&R Shirley Willis	519 491 1460
Communications	C&R Chris Cooke	519 381 0211
Congregational Care & Growth	C&R Bev Walkling	519 542 9872
Finance	C&R Paul Cooper	519 542 9237
Ministry & Personnel	C&R Laura Black	519 541 1332
Planning	C&R Jim Wicks	519 542 8621
Outreach	C&R Paul Cooper	519 542 9237
Property	C&R John Cooke	519 869 2908
Special Events	C&R Bev Walkling	519 542 9872
Trustees	C Joanna Catterson	519 328 1545
	R Pete Melanson	519 332 4914
Worship	C Bryce McGarvey	519 542 1542
	R John Baxter	519 542 1087
Nominating	Leslie Veldman	519 888 4198
A.O.T.S.	Paul Cooper	519 542 9237
	John Cooke	519 869 2908
Ministers	Rev. Dr. Kenji Marui	519 542 1203
	Rev. Pat Morrison	226 402 2292

WORSHIP MINISTRIES

Worship Committee ...

The **Worship Committee** works with the pastoral team to organize and coordinate the weekly worship services, as well as special services, as required. We review and approve requests for use of the sanctuary for non-routine worship and non-worship events that serve our congregation and/or our community.

Weekly worship services are offered in-person, live via Zoom and in a YouTube recorded format.

Thanks are extended to audio video volunteers who facilitated the in-service management and recording of the services in 2024: Gord Walkling, Séamus White, Chris Cooke and Ben Parkinson.

For a second consecutive year, Kenji organized a joint Good Friday service with St Bartholomew's Anglican Church. The service began at Grace with several readings followed by a procession to St Bartholomew's with a cross that they provided. The service ended with readings in the St Bart's sanctuary. Overall, it was a good collaboration with a neighbouring faith community.

Throughout the year, there were Sundays when both Pat and Kenji were unavailable, and Grace was fortunate to have several ministers come to Grace to preach. Thanks are extended to Debra McGill, Connie Capes-Leslie, Dan Leaver, Tom Rodger, Bob Gibson, and Murray Stephenson. Appreciation is also extended to worship committee members who assisted with introductory announcements and the liturgy.

In 2024, John Baxter served as the primary representative to Grace Council, with fill-in support from Gord Walkling and Bryce McGarvey.

Marque Smith is the Grace Music Director and leads the Choir, Junior Choir and arranges for guest musicians and vocalists whose musical offerings are all warmly appreciated by the congregation. Thanks are extended to Jim Wicks, Dave Ashdown and Brian Eagleson for additional music leadership support and to Valerie Schmidt and David Nichols for providing outstanding interim music leadership for the periods when Marque was unavailable.

In December, Kenji and Marque initiated a series of jazz worship services that take place in the sanctuary on Sunday afternoons, once per month. Kenji and Marque are thanked for spearheading this new initiative that includes guest musicians and welcomes all from the community.

Members of the Sanctuary Guild support the Worship Committee and are responsible for decorating the sanctuary to reflect changing liturgical seasons and funding of sanctuary-related activities. The members of the Worship Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the Sanctuary Guild members (Karen Cooke, Sharon and Pete Melanson, Karen and Jim Rutledge) for their work in decorating the sanctuary with liturgical seasonally themed wall banners and items throughout the church.

The committee expresses our gratitude to Lori Armstrong (retired) and Kathy Dodkin for their support of the worship services through the year. Kathy prepares the libretto for the minister and tech team and prepares and distributes the weekly emails to the congregation. Kathy also carries out many behind-the-scenes tasks that keep the worship services moving smoothly.

If you wish to participate or learn more about becoming a member of the Worship committee or volunteering in a specific area, such as being a Sunday morning greeter, part of the Sanctuary Guild, etc. please contact one of us.

John Baxter is resigning from the committee, and thanks are extended to him for his many years of service.

The 2024 Committee members were: Daniella D'Andrea, John Baxter, Tessa Hall, Bryce McGarvey, Sheila Scott, Marque Smith, Gord Walkling, and the Pastoral Team (ex officio).

Submitted by Bryce McGarvey, Chair

Sanctuary Guild...

The Sanctuary Guild is a subset of the Worship Committee, who looks after adorning the sanctuary throughout the changing church seasons. We are always looking for new members.

The 2025 members will be Karen Cooke, Sharon Melanson, Karen and Jim Rutledge and Jim Wicks.

Submitted by Sharon Melanson

Music Ministry at Grace...

2024 flew by so quickly and it was marvelous!

Thanks so much to Kenji Marui, Pat Morrison, Kathy Dodkin and Curtis Dixon for all that they do. I love collaborating with this staff.

Thanks so much to The Grace Choir for attending Thursday afternoon rehearsals and for their sensational singing at Sunday worship services.

Thanks so much to The Starlight Singers (The Junior Choir) for their amazing contribution for some of the worship services throughout the year. Thanks so much to Cecily Chiles for always assisting me so beautifully.

Thanks so much to Dave Ashdown, Jim Wicks, Brian Eagleson and Rob Larose for being the band in our Sunday worship services. They always sound great in everything that they do.

Thanks so much to Daphne Siklosi, Stella Siklosi, Al Shaw, Andy Shaw, Joel Eagleson, Joanna Catterson, Vanessa Benoit, Luciano Iacobelli, Cecily Chiles, Anika Austin-Chiles, Marianne Clift, David Nichols, Val Schmidt, Rick McGregor, Kalie Woodcock, Karissa Kern and Caitlin Mason for offering their musical gifts in Sunday worship services. I apologize if I have missed anyone as it is not my intention.

Thanks so much to all of the committees as always for all of the wonderful work that they do to enhance the life and growth of this congregation. I am very excited about 2025!

Love and Peace,
Marque Smith, Music Director

INREACH MINISTRIES

Congregational Care and Growth Committee...

The Congregational Care and Growth Committee traditionally meets on the third Wednesday morning of the month. In 2024, meetings have been a combination of in-person and hybrid. The committee oversaw the approval for persons requesting baptism, confirmation, profession of faith, transfer of membership, and weddings, as well as maintaining an up-to-date membership roll. It monitored the Benevolent Fund that is used to help people in need. We also sponsored groups as needed for physical use of the church.

In January, CJ from Bluewater First Aid Training Centre gave a presentation on the use of the defibrillator with an opportunity to practice. This led to taking a look at making sure our Defibrillator

is checked on a weekly basis. This was also open to community groups who use the church and some indeed participated.

This past year we undertook to send letters once again in February to Grace students attending college or university away from home to let them know we were thinking of them. Letters were written by committee and congregational members, and each one had a Tim Horton's gift card included as well as the message that they are not forgotten while away from us. We plan to do this again in 2025 and will be looking for letter writers and perhaps donations towards gift cards and postage given the increase in postal rates.

This year we also discussed collecting names of those who might be willing to help at funeral receptions offered at Grace but catered by outside groups. This also led to a review of the action lists in the office which were badly in need of an update.

In May Kenji offered a travelogue about his family trip to Japan which was held after church on a Sunday and was very well attended. We are open to ideas for other future talks or events and welcome suggestions through the office or to committee members.

We continue as a committee to promote and support affirming events and actions. We partnered with PFLAG for Pie Day in March and many congregation members supported the Pride Flag raising event in June. Chris Cooke has developed a button template that can be used with the button maker at the downtown library to make buttons that Grace members could wear when attending events such as the flag raising on May 31st for the beginning of June Pride month. We hope to plan more events in 2025 and welcome those who might be interested in supporting such events to speak to us and get involved in planning.

Flowers are sent to members celebrating special birthdays and anniversaries. We appreciate it if you know of one that you can let the office know. Easter flowers were delivered to members who had

experienced a close bereavement in the past year and those in long term care. We expanded on this a little further this year to include those who live on their own but have difficulties attending in person. This year the flowers were delivered to the church where they were picked up by the committee members.

Under the co-ordination of Sylvia Rose a team of church members has continued to stay in contact with all members of the congregation to assess how people were doing and whether there were any urgent pastoral needs that had to be met. For many this involved a single telephone call but for others, calls are being made on an ongoing basis. More volunteers would be lovely to ensure we can reach out especially to those who do not have computer access. The congregation is encouraged to continue to stay in touch with other church members by phone or email – especially with those in more isolated situations. We have placed a box of cards in the Narthex that people are welcome to access and use to send a note to other congregational members or friends beyond our membership. Children are also encouraged to access these cards as needed. Many thanks to all those who help in these areas.

Another continuing activity is our sponsorship of games afternoons. They are generally well attended and cross generational, allowing people of different ages to gather, play games and develop relationships. We are experimenting with dates and times and expanding into a pot-luck post games. All are invited to join, and a variety of games are offered.

In October our committee helped with arranging a volunteer/ new member recognition Sunday where cake was served, and Vice Chair Tory Walko spoke on behalf of council to thank everyone in the congregation who help in so many different ways to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

Prior to Christmas, our committee supported the third year of the presentation of a worship service on a Sunday afternoon called “A Quiet Christmas” to help address needs within the congregation to

meet and mourn together especially for congregation members who had died in the past year or so. Letters of invitation were sent to the families of those who had died to invite them to attend, and the service was also streamed via Zoom and uploaded to YouTube. Many thanks to Marque Smith for his assistance with this service. The service was very well received, and we had lots of positive feedback.

In 2025, the Congregational Care and Growth Committee will continue to promote spiritual growth and Christian care and fellowship within the congregation. Committee members for 2025 will be Margaret Cameron, Sylvia Rose, Bev Walkling, Diane Werezak, Elaine Roach, and the Pastoral Team (ex officio). Carol Holmes continues to be the point person for delivering cards and plants to those with special celebrations. We thank her so much for her contributions to our team and continued care for those in our congregation. New members are always welcome so if you have an interest feel free to speak to Kenji or any member of the team. Many thanks to Sylvia Rose for taking on secretarial duties & Marg Cameron for subbing in when needed. The committee thanks Lori Armstrong and Kathy Dodkin for providing a membership report for each meeting and for being a resource to the committee.

Submitted by Bev Walkling, Chair

2024 Records ...

Membership as of Dec. 31, 2023

Resident Members	315
Non-Resident Members	70
Total Membership	385

	Received	Removed
Members received through profession of faith	10	
Members received by certificate of transfer	6	
Members added by returning to resident status	1	
Total received	17	
Members removed by death		3
Members removed by transfer		0
Members removed by other		0
Total removed		3

Membership as of Dec. 31, 2024

Resident Members	329
Non-Resident Members	70
Total Membership	399

Number of baptisms	6
Number of marriages	2
Number of funerals	2

Jim Wicks, Roll Clerk

A.O.T.S. (As One That Serves) Men's Club...

A.O.T.S. administers and contributes to the Ken Plumley Award that is presented to graduating secondary school students. The 2024 recipient was Elizabeth Veldman. The fund received generous memorial donations from Church members and others in 2024, and we offer our sincere thank you for the contributions and support to graduating secondary school students. The A.O.T.S. Men's Club didn't resume activities in 2024. A.O.T.S. Executive members are Paul Cooper, John Cooke

Submitted by John Cooke

Mens Club...

We are a group of senior men, stout of heart and keen of mind (mostly), who gather together at Grace each Wednesday morning for coffee, fellowship and discussion. We meet in either the Friendship Room or the Chapel from 9 am. to 11 a.m. – Our non-judgemental opinions are offered on a wide variety of local, regional and worldwide events. – Advice gleaned over a lifetime is offered to those of us seeking help with individual concerns (e.g. how do I renew my passport, my dentist just retired, whom do you suggest?). We try to laugh a lot yet support each other during times and events that challenge one or more of us.

Newcomers are welcome!

Bill Palmer, Kirk Wilson, Brian Eagleson, Bernie Hendrickson, Mahesh Juthani, Joe Simon, Al McLean, Vernon Chiles, David Nichols, Ian McGuiness

Helen McKay Group...

The Helen McKay group meets in the Grace lounge on the 3rd Monday of the month. The 9 members take turns planning the program and choosing a related Bible verse. Judie Scott manages

“The Least Coin”. At the end of our year the money is donated to the HUB. We donated S. S. supplies to Grace, also donated to Women’s Interval Home, Riverside Vineyard, and to the INN. Three of our members knit small afghans to donate. We enjoy the fellowship of this small group.

OUTREACH, TEACHING & PROCLAMATION MINISTRIES

Outreach Committee ...

The Outreach Committee has a mandate to engage the Grace United congregation in:

- a. local outreach activities (usually in partnership with a local organization)
- b. providing a focal point for the United Church Mission and Service Fund
- c. communicating other international initiatives (e.g. disaster relief response), and
- d. sponsoring community groups who wish to use the Grace Church facilities

Lambton Refugee Committee

Our Syrian families are well and taking on the challenges associated with their new community. A new arrival, Adam, was added to Hussain’s family in 2024. Jaber is continuing his job as a bus driver. Hussain is focused on improving his English skills. Although our formal financial support was completed in November 2022, we are continuing to work with the family to help resolve ongoing issues and challenges. We are grateful for the support of the Grace congregation as well as the wider United Church and other local community members.

Community Living – Sarnia Lambton (CL-SL)

CL-SL continues to occupy and maintain the Grace United Church Manse as a respite residence for their clients. The CL dances at the Church gym are supported by the Grace youth.

Canadian Food Grains Bank

In 2024, we were advised by Brigden United Church that the key supporters of the “Forget-Me-Not” grow project were unable to continue. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with them over many years. Fortunately, the Bluewater Growing project is another local organization that we can support. A fund raiser is planned for 2025.

Mission & Service Fund

The Grace Congregation continued to support the United Church Mission and Service Fund. In 2024, M&S funding continued to be part of our unified budget although our commitment was reduced due to budget constraints. We also sponsor 3 special offerings, at Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas each year. Funds raised are over and above our budget commitments.

Circles

We sponsored a meal for one of the group meeting nights in May. Grace supports the great work being done to lift people out of poverty. Thanks to those who sponsored with money or food items and to those who helped serve the meal.

Rental Sponsorship

Outreach continued to sponsor a significant number of community groups that use our facilities. 2024 was an outstanding year for both returning as well as new groups.

Soup Luncheons

We had an active slate of soup luncheons in 2024. We supported the following organizations;

- Canadian Food Grains Bank (with Brigden UC)
- Rayjon

- Lambton United Church Center
- Habitat for Humanity
- Nightlight

We are very grateful for the wonderful soup makers in our congregation and for other members of the congregation, particularly the youth, who help with the setup and cleanup associated with the soup luncheons. ****See separate list of Valued soup makers

Inn of the Good Shepherd (IOGS)

We were able to maintain our monthly meal support thanks to many volunteers helping with meal preparation at Grace and meal serving at the Inn.

IOGS Volunteers

Sylvia & Don Rose	Gord Walkling Ingrid	Terry (the dish <u>washer</u>)
Colette & Bryce McGarvey	McFarlane Kenji Marui	Cathy Rose Karen Green
Joanna Catterson Bill & Betty	Jane Janes Deb Kafford	Lynda Ruston
Carson Maggie Rochon	Cecily Chiles & friends	Salad Preparation
Mary Mellon Paul & Lorna	Nadyne Dell David & Daphne	Karen Cooke
Cooper Barb Kilburn	Murray Joyce Rawson &	Desserts Barb Kilburn
Karen Routledge Kirk Wilson and Nan	Dennis Kenji Marui	Karen Green

The congregation continue to bring food supplies for the Inn on the first Sunday of each month. A total of 1500 pounds was donated in

2024. We also supported the Inn financially in 2024 with cash donations of \$2500. We are grateful to the many people who help with these activities as well as those who make donations to help pay for the food used in meal preparation.

We welcome new volunteers. It is a great way to get to know others in the congregation. We serve one meal each month on the fourth Wednesday. Meal preparation is normally done from 9 AM to noon at Grace with serving of the meal done from noon to 2. 30 PM at the Inn. If you wish to help prepare meals or work at the Inn, please contact Maggie Rochon or leave your name with the office.

Other Activities

The Outreach Committee recognizes that many members of the congregation and other committees are involved with significant outreach activities. This is an active demonstration of the involvement by Grace United church people in the community around us. We hope to continue to learn about and help publicize these activities.

Members of the Outreach committee in 2025 will be:

Karen Rutledge, Maggie Rochon, Deb Kafford, Paul Cooper, Colette McGarvey, Joyce Rawson, Lynda Ruston, Sue Wicks

The Outreach Committee welcomes new members who may feel called to participate in this rewarding activity at Grace. You are welcome to participate in the activities or to initiate a new Outreach activity to energize the congregation. Please approach any member of the committee for more information.

Submitted by Paul Cooper, Chair

Christian Development Committee...

We had a great year this year as we continued our programs in this changing time. We continue to offer programs that allow us to fulfil our baptism promise.

Our Sunday morning; Nursery, Kinder Worship, Children's Worship, SPLAT!, and High School programming have continued to develop our children and youth biblical literacy. The program allows the participants to play with and digest the biblical stories, experimenting with the historical-critical method in an age-appropriate way. We have very faithful and competent leaders for these programs, and we appreciate the time and care they give to the young people of all ages.

Our two-year confirmation class, with the Guidance of Pat and Gord, continues to challenge the Grace youth and arm them with the tools they need to discern their relationship with God. It challenges them to go deeper in their own person journey. The second years are partnered with mentors, which is an important way to connect the youth with congregants that they can trust to help them in this journey. It also allows congregation members another way to fulfil their baptism promise as members on Grace.

Youth group continues to meet Sunday nights to share in fun and intimate sharing time. This program allows the young people to really be honest about the things that are going on in their lives. And gives them a safe caring place to have these conversations.

Jolt Nite continued monthly with high school youth planning and delivering the program and children grades 4 to 8 participating in the fun. Jolt allows grace kids to invite friends to the church for a positive, comfortable experience within the walls of the church.

Community Living Dances continued to be a youth-led program that offers an evening of fun and dance for Community Living clients

across the county. Under the leadership of Seamus White and Kari Rent, Grace youth fulfil our vision as a community partner.

For the first time in 25 years, we did not receive funding to hire summer students, so Campfires took a bit of a different format. The focus remained on bringing together generations for share experiences. Weekly attendance was strong, and feedback suggests that Campfires are an effective multi-generational program. Thanks so much to Margaret Billings and John and Karen Cooke for looking after the BBQ and the food part of the night.

The church retreat was back again this year with multigenerational programs. Grace members of all ages were able to connect on a very intimate level with each other. It was great way for the youth and the older generation to listen to each other and really connect. The food was delicious and a gift from the Chan family.

Beyond programming, the Christian Development Committee began the work of visioning on behalf of the congregation. We are concerned for the wellbeing of our young people so have set to the practice of discernment. We have carved out time within and beyond formal meeting time to study the cultural forces that form our youth, discern what developmental nutrients might be missing, and explore how God might be calling us to respond.

There are many things going on at the church that are successful because of Pat's leadership. His ability to connect with and understand young people and his openness to creative and new ways of thinking have helped keep us current. We also appreciate the many faithful volunteers that we count on to lead programming. CD programming relies heavily on volunteers and their care for the young people at Grace is very evident.

Committee membership for 2025: Shirley Willis (Chair), Marilyn Barros, Margaret Billings.

Proclamation & Special Events Committee (P&SE)...

We are a small committee consisting of Bev Walkling and Yvonne Vanderbeld. We have learned through various fundraising models to ask for help and have done so in many forms. Bill Yates, though not an official member, still does many of the graphics, posters, mass emails and database/spreadsheet organization that is necessary to provide information and keep it all straight. Bev is the social media expert who spreads the word through Facebook and all the contacts she has, creating postings in her personal accounts and other forms of print media, often getting volunteered to do the 'one minute' in church. She chairs meetings, provides experiential insight and helps to organize events. In the office, Kathy runs off the needed order forms and advertising, takes walk-in orders and cash payments, and records e-transfers.

We started the year off with a fundraiser that was new to us – a Pasta Fest that was held on April 18, 2024, requiring pick-up of orders at the Dante Club. It featured a delicious meal of penne pasta with two large meatballs and focaccia bread. Gluten Free and Vegetarian meal options were also available. These were ordered on various pre-determined half-hour segments, as meals are prepared hot and fresh every half hour on the day of delivery when customers come to pick up their order.

Discussion for this event began in mid-January 2024, with the active campaign starting in the first week of March 2024. For this event, we decided that the most urgent need for funds would be for the repairs and upgrades planned in the north parking lot. As well, we asked for donations, and that helped to increase the profit for this event.

The Facts:

160 pasta meals were sold @\$15	\$2400.00
each (160 x \$15) =	
PROFIT	\$1044.00
Donations for the Grace parking Lot	\$ 505.00
(11 donors, from both individuals and user groups)	
Total Funds Raised	\$1549.00

The day of our event was picture perfect – ideal spring weather with sunshine and a refreshing breeze. It was a blessing compared to the storm warnings and heavy rainfall of the previous day, and the cold, steady drizzle of the following day. Since this fundraiser requires volunteers to be outside to meet customers in their cars and to deliver orders to the vehicles, you can plan every detail, but you can't plan for good weather in advance.

In June, we started discussion with DeGroot's Nurseries to sell Gift Cards in denominations of \$20, \$50 and \$100 as another new fundraiser took root. Fall is a busy planting season for perennials, bulbs and larger shrubs, as well as making purchases for fertilizers and other landscaping supplies. We had hoped that gift cards could also be purchased in advance for special occasions, or as Christmas gifts. DeGroot's has a stunning array of unique and useful gifts for everyone, gardeners or not, something that can be purchased for any season of the year. Our fundraising campaign began on September 12, 2024 and closed on September 27th. Two days later, most people who ordered had their gift cards already in hand!

Our total sales were for \$1580.00 –

\$100 x 8 cards = \$800

\$50 x 12 cards = \$600

\$20 x 9 cards = \$180

We were able to make a profit of \$316 from this fundraiser. We may consider running it in the spring another time to see if we can get more participation, but since this was our first DeGroot's

fundraiser, we were pleased with the results. It's good to know that Gift Cards do not expire, and can be used at any time.

During the summer, the Proclamation and Special Events Committee looked to revise the existing Grace Charitable Gaming Policy. It had been drafted a number of years ago, and did not include some of the changing, acceptable activities that have become normalized during fundraising events where ticket-selling and draws are included. This might be at events such as Trivia Night, a bazaar, or those held at outside venues that might include, or be sponsored by Grace. The policy was revised and approved by Grace Council on November 6, 2024.

For the first time since the Pandemic, Grace United Church hosted a Fall Fair on Saturday, October 19, 2024 between 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. It was a large undertaking, coordinated by Bev Walkling and Yvonne Vanderbeld, and with the help of many hands. A planning meeting was held in June where ideas and commitments to help were offered. As well, there were many work sessions to make apple blossoms, salsa and chili. Soup kits were assembled and distributed to volunteers, with frozen and stored soups readied for sale on Fair Day. A dedicated committee ran a successful pancake breakfast in the first half of the morning, while another group worked the barbecue to great approval. Bev secured 10 vendors who were specifically handmade craft vendors, not selling commercial products. Each vendor donated one of their items to put into the Silent Auction. The bake table and the preserves were a big hit this year. Food is always a winner!

There were some favourite activities that we could not include this year because of lack of volunteers. eg. Attic Treasures and the Tea Room. The sign-up sheets were well received, except for the one for volunteering on cleanup duty. We will use the sheets again next year, as help is always needed. Unsold books were stored and donated to Dunlop Central for their Fall Fair. Yvonne brought a carload of donations, mostly items unsold at the Silent Auction, to the Mission Store after the sale.

A survey was sent out via the church newsletter, and the comments and suggestions have been collated to use for next year. Thank you for your great input! Changes can happen only if we have the manpower to implement them! One of the changes that we are considering for 2025 is making sure to have a lead coordinator for each activity, and that person would seek volunteers based on their needs for help. The date for next year's fair has already been booked for Saturday, October 18th. Mark it on your new 2025 calendars... and Save the Date!

Unofficial numbers for the Fall Fair 2024: Total receipts approx.

\$5000

Add \$150 to the silent auction – items that hadn't been paid for or picked up by closing time. Expenses \$200 from chili, \$150 (guesstimate) from pancakes, and \$90 from baking for expenses.

Pancake Breakfast	\$ 476.85
BBQ	\$ 342.00
Baking	\$ 858.00
Soups/Chili	\$ 942.00
Preserves	\$ 762.75
Linens, Aprons etc.	\$ 152.00
Jewelry	\$ 296.40
Books	\$ 729.10
Popcorn	\$ 12.05
Photo Cards	\$ 130.00
Cards	\$ 40.00
Community Vendors	\$ 225.00
Silent Auction	\$ 401.00

Our next fundraiser of the year was a family favourite – the Giresi's Pizza Kit fundraiser. The ingredients supplied are always fresh, and the kit makes a pizza that is as close to homemade as you can get and has that great Giresi pizza flavour. We contacted Giresi's in July so that we could pick a delivery date (pick up days are only on Sunday mornings when the store is generally closed).

However, the date we preferred was already taken, and the next available date was on November 3rd. For this campaign we sold 55 pizza kits and were able to make \$330. 00, which was turned over to the Grace's General Fund.

On Sunday, December 1st, Grace presented the first of a series of Jazz Concerts that was combined with an uplifting Vesper service. It was well attended and enthusiastically received. Our music director, Marque Smith and three band members, music aficionados, provided a spirited musical experience while our minister, Kenji Marui hosted the event and provided the "Christmas Connection". The Proclamation and Special Events Committee, which administers The Inspiration Fund, was pleased to provide the seed money to make this event financially possible. The donations from the Freewill Offering at the concert will help maintain and grow the fund for future Jazz concerts.

Our last fundraiser of the year (4 in four months this fall!) was the Poinsettia sale from Prail's Greenhouse, taking orders during all of November, leaving December to pick-up plant orders. Though we have done a poinsettia sale before, this was the first time that Prail's took only online orders from registered fundraising groups who were vying for the same limited 1000 poinsettias. It was also the first time that we did not have to keep track of who ordered, or collect the monies for the plants, as Prail's did all of that for us. When all the 1000 plants were sold to the various groups who had signed up, the fundraiser ended! Grace had sold 31 plants and we were able to raise \$155! However, in the Christmas spirit, Prail's donated an additional \$100! So, from this fundraiser, we could announce that \$255. 00 was raised for Grace's General Funds.

Submitted by Yvonne Vanderbeld

GOVERNANCE & SUPPORT MINISTRIES

Board of Trustees...

The Trustees hold the congregational property in trust for the congregation as part of The United Church of Canada and are responsible for ensuring proper use and maintenance of the property, adequate insurance, and that congregational funds are properly invested. They are also responsible for any transactions of property such as leases or sale of land/buildings. The current trustees are Joanna Catterson (Chair), Bruce Davies, Neil Holloway (Secretary), Pete Melanson, Ray Phillips and the ministerial staff. Pete Melanson and Ray Phillips have indicated that they will be retiring as of the Annual General Meeting 2025, and we thank them for their years of service.

This past year, the Grace Council tasked the Trustees with obtaining up-to-date information regarding the process for considering various uses of the property that we own, including rules around selling, leasing, servicing, parking requirements, and zoning. This was done not with any particular project in mind, but simply so that all members of Council had a common understanding of the rules and processes for potential property use. A report to Council was provided.

As per the requirement of the position, Trustees also met with members of the Finance Committee to review the plan for investments that were coming due, renewed the insurance for the 2025 year and continued to work with Finance and Community Living to finalize changes to the lease for the Manse.

Upcoming projects include a more in-depth examination of possible insurance providers, the completion of the aforementioned lease with Community Living, and continued support to Council as they consider possible ways to partner with community organizations that may involve use of our property.

Submitted by Joanna Catterson, Chair

Communications Committee ...

In 2024, the committee organized the release of a new photo directory. Thank you to all the volunteers that supported the effort, and to all the families that participated. The feedback regarding the staff from IPC was very positive.

The committee also continued the roll-out of our new logo with t-shirts generously donated by the Shaw Family. Well over 100 shirts were distributed. They look spiffy! Be sure to wear your shirt in public, and don't be afraid to explain what our community means to you. Additionally, Bev Walkling put together a few dozen Grace United Church pins. They've been worn by church members at several community events. Next steps remain a fresh of the website, new pew pamphlets and a "welcome kiosk".

The final installation of the Room 9 television and cupboard was completed. Thank you to Jim Wicks and Ben Parkinson for all their support on this project.

Did you know the church offers several devices to support your groups or church activities?

- The volunteer laptop is available as a loaner to support your group or church activity. Please contact the office to make arrangements.
- A basic sound system (speakers and microphone) is available in the gym stage closet (indoor key). Its suitable for speeches or music in the gym.
- Room 9 includes a television suitable for meetings or movies. Watch from the comfy couch or table and chairs. Stream YouTube or Pluto TV for free OR connect your laptop via Android screen sharing, Apple AirPlay or the HDMI cable.

- The Friendship Room includes a projector and screen suitable for meetings or movies. Connect your laptop via the HDMI cable. The chairs or couches can be arranged for viewing.
- A portable projector with speaker is available in the Friendship Room closet (indoor key). It can either be projected on to the gym wall or to screens mounted in Room 1, the Chapel, Room 10 or gym stage.
- Highspeed “Wifi” internet is available throughout the church (SSID = graceuc_guest, password = love&faith). Anyone entering our building is welcome to connect.

Our Office Administrator, Lori Armstrong, retired in April after 26 years and we welcomed Kathy Dodkin to the team. Thank you to both Lori and Kathy for making such a smooth transition.

Thank you to Curtis Dixon for maintaining the outdoor sign.

Thank you to Marianne Nichols for maintaining the photo boards found in the hallway outside the Friendship Room. It's nice to be able to see what everyone has been up to at the church, or to be reminded of an enjoyable event.

Thank you to Bev Walkling for her photo taking and continued Facebook posting.

The Communications Initiatives Fund supports activities of the committee. There were only minor purchases through 2024.

The committee membership for 2025 is Christopher Cooke (Chair), Marianne Nichols and Bev Walkling.

Submitted by Christopher Cooke, Chair

Ministry & Personnel Committee...

The Ministry and Personnel Committee at Grace meets on the third Tuesday of each month. This year we welcomed Jane Allen to join the other members Laura Black, Joanna Catterson, John Cooke, and John Scott. We are responsible for staff contracts, salaries and benefits, approving vacation time, staff appraisals, and acting as a liaison and confidential sounding board for staff.

This past year our Office Administrator, Lori Armstrong, retired. A search committee was convened that included John Scott as representation from M&P and Kathy Dodkin was hired as our new Office Administrator. The M&P Committee was responsible for ensuring a smooth transition, including contract development, all background checks, and Health and Safety training.

Part of our role is to support our staff during times of celebration and sadness. This year we celebrated the joyous occasion of the wedding of Music Director Marque Smith and Andrew Koonstra. As usual, we provided for a staff gathering at Christmas.

Submitted by Joanna Catterson

Property Committee...

The Property Committee offers our sincere thank you to: Curtis for his attentive work and quick response to building & property issues.

Kathy for her administration of the rental policy and improving building utilization by user groups.

- John Scott for his support to Curtis and his willingness to help when needed.
- Brian Eagleson, Jim Wicks, Diego Butterworth and George Vero for assistance with repairs and projects.
- Joyce Rawson for cleaning kitchen linens.

- Cecily Chiles for planning and coordinating landscape maintenance/improvement.
- Contributors to the fundraisers (Pasta Dinner, Find Your Place & DeGroot's gift certificates) which made it possible to complete the parking lot project.
- Contributors to the Capital Replacement Fund which supports projects and unexpected maintenance.
- Ben Parkinson who provided weekend snow shoveling.
- John Cooke for the leadership and dedication to maintaining this place where people gather.

Property activities are focused on essential maintenance and strategic improvements. 2024 initiatives and projects included:

- The circular garden near the Cathcart entrance was rebuilt and rejuvenated with native plantings.
- Phase 2 Parking Lot Repairs were completed including repaving some sections and painting the lines and logos. A portion of the cost was funded by the Legacy Fund.
- A large tree was removed from the north end of the parking lot due to safety concerns.
- Temperature switches were added to the gym rads to make more effective use of the heating capacity.
- Several plumbing repairs and improvements were completed.
- User group activity increased throughout the year. Sarnia 5th Scouts started meeting at Grace in September with Pat Morrison as the Grace UC Rep.

The Committee invites new members to join the committee or volunteer time to help with projects. There is also an opportunity to lead the Greening GRACEfully subcommittee to implement projects to improve energy efficiency and reduce natural gas usage.

The 2025 committee members will be John Cooke, Cecily Chiles and Brian Eagleson.

Submitted by John Cooke, Chair

Planning Committee...

The role of the Planning Committee is to “*keep aware of, and challenge Grace United Church to respond to changes in direction occurring in the church at large*”. With declining attendance at churches and other pressures on churches, Grace faces many opportunities to continue to thrive as a United Church serving our diverse and active congregation.

The 2024 Planning Committee membership included: Cecily Chiles, Regan Pfaff –MacDonald, Marion Staples, Tory Walko and Jim Wicks (Chair).

The Focus of the Planning Committee in 2024

We wrestled with the concept of the longer-term plans for Grace in the face of many uncertainties and opportunities.

- We encouraged each committee to better inform the congregation of their work and how individuals can help. This included “Did You know?” minutes during worship and information banners at a number of church events
- We continued to support district-wide and internal efforts to determine what Grace, its property and its congregation can make to find solutions to for the un-homed reality in our community
- We explored various approaches to Stewardship that would resonate with today’s faith community recognizing the diverse manners in which individuals contribute and support the work of the church
- I would like to extend hearty thanks to Marion Staples and Marylin Barros for their extensive work over the summer to learn about the various approaches available to us for a Stewardship effort.

The Future Focus of the Planning Committee in 2025

- Planning will focus on the overall “health” of Grace with an effort that goes beyond the traditional stewardship effort and

focuses not just on our financial needs, but would include spiritual needs, relationships and growing our community.

- Our approach to “visioning” the future of Grace will be to focus on finding ways to facilitate smaller, congregant-lead initiatives that will build on the community we have and to support all groups who use the church as a gathering place.
- Planning will provide support to the Property Committee during the proposed energy audit related to the “Greening of Grace” initiative and support the follow-up activities.
- Planning will continue to offer support to any individuals who would like to start and/or plan a new initiative to help enhance our Grace community .
- Planning will continue to better understand what we need to do as a community to ensure that there is a place for all.

The 2025 Planning Committee membership will be: Cecily Chiles, Regan Pfaff –MacDonald, Marion Staples, Jim Wicks (Chair) and Vice Chair of Council (TBN)

Submitted by Jim Wicks, Chair

Finance Committee ...

The Finance Committee is responsible to effectively manage the Church Finances, to regularly provide updates to the Congregation and to communicate issues and proposed resolutions to Council.

2024 was a positive year financially for Grace. We ended the year with a balanced budget even though there were significant cost increases in some areas. Givings were on-plan despite an aggressive target. More people are using stock donations to reduce any capital gains impacts. Rental income exceeded expectations – thanks again to Lori Armstrong and now Kathy Dodkin for all the work they have done with the outside groups who use our facilities. As a Church, we remain debt free.

Financially, the congregation also made significant contributions to a number of Outreach initiatives (see the summary in the Annual Report). Contributions were also made to specific funds that support the ministries of the Church.

At the end of 2024, the market value of Grace UC funds at the Sarnia Community Foundation (SCF) was \$68,866. A withdrawal of \$1800 was made to support youth initiatives in 2024. SCF funds support the following;

- funds to support youth initiatives (Tom Murray and Gwen Hopper)
- Ken Plumley Youth Scholarship
- Tom and Donna Moore Fund
- General Grace Fund

The legacy fund was re-invested in November 2024 with favourable rates (5.55% for fixed term GIC and 3.25% for cashable GIC). Interest from the GICs was also used to support the operating budget in 2024.

The 2025 proposed operating budget predicts a deficit of about \$11K which will be partially covered by the Reserve Fund but also require support from the legacy fund interest and principal. It also includes some focus areas (like special events and FUNDSCRIP) to generate additional income. We hope the congregation will continue to support these activities. Our long term goal remains balanced budgets.

Proposed Finance Committee members for 2025 are; Ian McGuinness, Paul Cooper, Marion Staples and Wayne Pease (Treasurer). Bob Newman is retiring from the assistant treasurer position in 2025 after many years of service. Bob has championed many improvements in our financial system and will be missed. Bob – we hope you will be available on a consultant basis as we anticipate steep learning curves ahead.

We welcome new members. It's a great way to learn more about Church finances.

Finally, thank you to all members of the congregation who have contributed financially to the operating budget, specific funds, and outreach initiatives in 2024. Without your generosity, Grace could not sustain the ministries that support both the local and international communities around us.

Submitted by Paul Cooper, Chair

Financial Statements...

	2023	2024 Budget	2024	2025 Budget
Givings for Operating Budget	\$ 334,175.67	\$ 354,000.00	\$ 350,787.66	\$ 354,000.00
Designated M & S Givings	\$ 5,284.92	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 5,511.92	\$ 3,500.00
Total Givings - Unified Budget	\$ 339,460.59	\$ 357,500.00	\$ 356,299.58	\$ 357,500.00
Other Income				
Rental	\$ 42,403.10	\$ 47,500.00	\$ 55,991.50	\$ 58,000.00
Donations	\$ 3,650.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,230.85	\$ 3,500.00
Interest	\$ 21,927.36	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 23,538.38	\$ 20,000.00
Special Events	\$ 751.69	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,770.68	\$ 7,000.00
Other Income	\$ 282.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 399.50	\$ 2,000.00
	\$ 408,474.74	\$434,500.00	\$ 445,230.49	\$ 448,000.00
Committee Expenditure				
Congregational Care and Growth	\$ 212.92	\$ 1,160.00	\$ 537.55	\$ 1,160.00
Outreach	\$ 125.00			
Christian Development	\$ 1,040.92	\$ 2,200.00	\$ 1,865.70	\$ 2,200.00
Worship	\$ 1,570.65	\$ 2,550.00	\$ 2,276.99	\$ 2,500.00
Communications	\$ 8,031.35	\$ 8,000.00	\$ 7,071.60	\$ 8,000.00
Ministry and Personnel	\$ 326,488.02	\$ 354,200.00	\$ 354,583.48	\$ 365,000.00
Trustees	\$ 10,531.82	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,426.19	\$ 12,950.00
Property	\$ 39,232.60	\$ 37,500.00	\$ 37,565.51	\$ 39,680.00
Finance	\$ 3,378.32	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,303.10	\$ 3,500.00
Region 7	\$ 18,208.00	\$ 19,100.00	\$ 19,340.18	\$ 17,604.00
Council	\$ 239.41		\$ 341.86	
M & S	\$ 17,500.00	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 7,000.00
Total Expenditure	\$ 426,559.01	\$ 447,210.00	\$ 446,312.16	\$ 459,594.00
Net Income vs. Expenditure	-\$ 18,084.27	-\$ 12,710.00	-\$ 1,081.67	-\$ 11,594.00
Transfer to Reserve Fund				
Transfer from Reserve Fund	\$ 18,084.27	\$ 2,715.00	\$ 1,081.67	
Transfer from Legacy Fund		\$ 9,995.00		\$11,594.00
	-\$ 0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Assets	2023	2024
Royal Bank Chequing	\$ 20,405.14	\$ 20,359.79
RBC Business Chequing	\$ 351.00	\$ -
RBC Money Market	\$ 102,764.67	\$ 77,173.14
Scotiabank Cashable GIC	\$ 52,270.68	\$ 71,400.54
Scotiabank LT GIC	\$ 301,824.66	\$ 301,824.71
Petty Cash	\$ 131.78	\$ 258.41
Accounts Receivable	\$ 4,939.60	\$ 4,018.63
Total Assets	\$ 482,687.53	\$ 475,035.22
Liabilities and Equity		
Accounts Payable	\$ 2,059.83	\$ 838.14
Church Funds		
Affirming	\$ 147.18	\$ 147.18
Reserve	\$ 43,367.91	\$ 42,286.24
Youth Initiatives	\$ 4,245.02	\$ 7,390.05
Lunches for Learning	\$ 12,379.81	\$ 12,379.81
Inn of the Good Shepherd	\$ 1,578.17	\$ 1,837.95
Youth Worship	\$ 2,436.54	\$ 2,532.48
Capital Replacement Fund	\$ 2,776.51	\$ 30,282.77
Benevolent Fund	\$ 1,616.29	\$ 1,437.37
Legacy Fund	\$ 346,875.94	\$ 315,909.26
Ken Plumley Fund	\$ 10,591.02	\$ 11,656.02
Resonance Project	\$ 10,878.40	\$ 2,924.02
Inspiration Fund	\$ 8,725.64	\$ 8,995.64
Leadership Development Fund	\$ 7,000.59	\$ 7,000.59
Memorial Fund	\$ 13,473.56	\$ 14,779.00
Communications Initiative Fund	\$ 2,941.58	\$ 3,044.68
	\$ 469,034.16	\$ 462,603.06
General Fund	\$ 11,593.54	\$ 11,594.02
Total Funds	\$ 480,627.70	\$ 474,197.08
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$ 482,687.53	\$ 475,035.22
Schedule of Accounts Payable		
Church Key Deposits	\$ 260.00	
VISA	\$ 578.14	
	\$ 838.14	
Schedule of Accounts Receivable		
HST	\$ 4,018.63	

2024 Outreach Report		
United Church of Canada Missionary and Service		
Givings from Unified Budget		\$ 7,000.00
Easter M and S		\$ 300.00
Thanksgiving M and S		\$ 125.00
Christmas M and S		\$ 200.00
Subtotal		\$ 7,625.00
Soup Luncheons		
Brigden - CFG Project		\$ 2,340.00
Rayjon		\$ 2,485.00
Lambton Centre		\$ 1,890.00
Brain Injury Association		\$ 1,800.00
Nightlight		\$ 1,625.00
Habitat for Humanity		\$ 2,065.00
Subtotal		\$ 12,205.00
Other Donations		
Inn Meals and Donations		\$ 4,635.07
Bluewater Growing Project		\$ 1,000.00
Rayjon		\$ 1,000.00
Women's Interval Home		\$ 150.00
Lambton Centre		\$ 965.00
Subtotal		\$ 7,750.07
Fair value manse rental		\$ 19,500.00
Total		\$ 47,080.07

Grace United Church

Summary of all Donations by Category Between January 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024

Printed: February 20, 2025

Category	Amount	# Donations	# Donors
Capital Replacement	\$9,834.66	99	59
CD Committee	\$25.00	1	1
Communications Initi	\$175.00	7	1
Communion Fund	\$861.75	31	15
General	\$340,869.21	1,678	178
Initial Offering	\$190.00	10	10
Inn	\$3,228.00	54	15
Inspiration Fund	\$170.00	6	6
M and S	\$5,746.92	174	24
Memorial Fund	\$1,635.00	32	31
Other	\$4,915.00	96	42
Soup Luncheon	\$12,205.00	277	93

Totals:

\$379,855.54

2,465

Total Distinct Donors across all Categories: 218

Grace United Church

Totals by Dollar Ranges for the last two years

Printed: February 20, 2025

Dollar Range	2023 Count	%	2023 Total	%	2024 Count	%	2024 Total	%
\$0.01 - \$50	52	22.6	\$1,655.00	0.4	61	28.0	\$1,765.00	0.5
\$50.01 - \$100	21	9.1	\$1,803.00	0.5	13	6.0	\$1,160.00	0.3
\$100.01 - \$200	9	3.9	\$1,307.00	0.4	13	6.0	\$2,060.00	0.5
\$200.01 - \$300	14	6.1	\$3,585.00	1.0	5	2.3	\$1,195.00	0.3
\$300.01 - \$400	8	3.5	\$2,900.00	0.8	8	3.7	\$2,860.00	0.8
\$400.01 - \$500	9	3.9	\$4,310.00	1.2	4	1.8	\$1,935.00	0.5
\$500.01 - \$600	11	4.8	\$6,251.00	1.7	10	4.6	\$5,665.00	1.5
\$600.01 - \$700	3	1.3	\$1,975.00	0.5	6	2.8	\$3,912.00	1.0
\$700.01 - \$800	5	2.2	\$3,854.22	1.0	3	1.4	\$2,220.00	0.6
\$800.01 - \$900	3	1.3	\$2,536.25	0.7	4	1.8	\$3,440.00	0.9
\$900.01 - \$1,000	10	4.3	\$9,705.00	2.6	7	3.2	\$6,788.00	1.8
\$1,000.01 - \$1,500	27	11.7	\$32,452.95	8.8	23	10.6	\$28,395.00	7.5
\$1,500.01 - \$2,000	12	5.2	\$21,424.15	5.8	14	6.4	\$24,816.30	6.5
\$2,000.01 - \$3,000	17	7.4	\$42,796.00	11.6	15	6.9	\$36,450.16	9.6
\$3,000.01 - \$4,000	7	3.0	\$24,390.00	6.6	9	4.1	\$30,430.00	8.0
\$4,000.01 - \$5,000	5	2.2	\$22,340.00	6.1	5	2.3	\$22,714.33	6.0
\$5,000.01 - \$6,000	5	2.2	\$27,115.90	7.4	3	1.4	\$16,428.00	4.3
\$6,000.01 - \$7,000	1	0.4	\$6,350.00	1.7	4	1.8	\$25,465.15	6.7
\$7,000.01 - \$8,000	2	0.9	\$14,960.00	4.1	1	0.5	\$7,405.00	1.9
\$8,000.01 - \$9,000	1	0.4	\$8,615.00	2.3	0	0.0	\$0.00	0.0
\$9,000.01 - \$10,000	1	0.4	\$10,000.00	2.7	1	0.5	\$9,515.00	2.5
Over \$10,000	7	3.0	\$117,794.92	32.0	9	4.1	\$145,236.60	38.2
Totals:	230		\$368,120.39		218		\$379,855.54	

Region Representative ...

[Marilyn Barros serves as the Grace United Church representative to the Antler River Watershed (ARW) Regional Council.]

- Two Regional meetings were attended one in person in the spring in Port Elgin, ON the other online in the fall
- Shared some of the content of Antler River Watershed Regional Council upcoming events or resources at monthly Grace Council meetings. Invited council members to either subscribe to the newsletter or go online to view the upcoming events. Everyone can access this newsletter at:
<https://arwrcucc.us20.list-manage.com/track/click?u=ee15470ca4eab124ea964929b&id=8506a09182&e=f41cbad4be>
- Attended a few of the online offerings through ARW Regional Council. Some were recordings, some were in person on-line. Topics included: 1) Racism, 2) Stewardship Resources – living in the way of Jesus, Stewardship is Discipleship, 3) Are You a Vulnerable Congregation.
- I had the privilege of hearing the Moderator, The Right Rev. Carmen Lansdowne speak at the Tri-Regional spring meeting in Port Elgin. I had the honor to be part of the ordination service for our own, Pat Morrison. This sacramental ceremony was not something I had participated in before. It was a powerful hands-on way to see God at work in our congregation, regional council and within the larger United Church of Canada.
- Rev. Lansdowne words were meaningful and have stayed with me. She referred to a book, *Life Together*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer throughout the entire weekend. There were many moments that Carmen inspired us, challenged us to really see each other in our communities on a deeper level, from an honest, vulnerable perspective. She shares one of her learnings from Bonhoeffer's book – *the more genuine and deeper the community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede and through Christ we really do have one another*. Carmen emphasizes we need to live for each other not just

with each other, to practice gratitude for each other and to recognize when we need each other. She wraps up one of her messages by sharing – if we see ourselves as belonging to Christ, we can free ourselves from judgement and control to practice gratitude and love.

- Many communities of faith began plans for the 100th Anniversary of the United Church that takes place in 2025.

Respectfully submitted, Marilyn Barros

Nominating Committee...

The Grace Nominating Committee is responsible for overseeing the process that ensures that all congregation members are appropriately represented on the Church Council. At this time, the committee is currently contacting members of the congregation in order to fill the various open Council positions. As of the date of printing of the annual report, the committee is still in the recruitment phase. It is our hope that a full slate of candidates will be presented for the congregation's approval at the Annual Meeting in March. It has been my pleasure to serve the congregation. I look forward to seeing the gifts of the future members of council. Best regards.

Submitted by Leslie Veldman, Chair

CHURCH STAFF

PASTORAL TEAM: Kenji Marui,
B. Sc. H. , M. Div. , D. Min.
Patrick Morrison,
B. Math, DLM.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC: Marque Smith

CUSTODIAN: Curtis Dixon

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR: Kathy Dodkin

IN MEMORIAM (2024)

Neil Pole	February 12
Barbara Hart	April 12
Daulphine Smith	June 2
Arnold Davies	June 18