



# ANNUAL REPORT

2022

BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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## Church Statistics

### I. Deaths - 5

04-02-2022 Fred Pesek  
04-08-2022 Marge Rahnenfeuhrer  
06-15-2022 Anna Mary Fisher  
10-11-2022 Bill Toneff  
10-19-2022 Lenore Harris

### II. New Members - 6

12-11-2022 Garret & Gary Brezina  
Gayle Colbert  
Kate Matthews  
Shelley Novotney  
Marilyn Pay

Total Members as of 2/1/2022     **148**  
Total Members as of 2/1/2023     **149**

## From Pastor John

Time flies when you're having fun! It's hard to believe that it's been a year since I began as pastor at Brecksville United Church of Christ. I have certainly found a warm welcome here. I have felt deeply grateful for that – twice! The first time I experienced your welcome happened around 2008, when Katie and I were newlyweds looking for a church. Brecksville UCC was the fifth church we visited. We knew very quickly that this would become our home because you, the congregation, were so gracious and hospitable.

I have great news to share! Others are feeling that welcome too. Our participation and membership are increasing. For the past three months, average attendance at Sunday services grew by 83% compared to the same period the previous year. We had six new members join in December, and another bunch ready to join this month. We are growing. With that new growth comes an opportunity for reflection.

In his book ***Becoming a Welcoming Church***, Thom Rainer encourages us to look at ourselves from the fresh perspective of a new guest coming to church for the first time. In almost all of his consultations, church members perceive their church to be friendly. But as he surveyed guests, he found that the guests typically perceived that same church experience differently.

This “perception chasm” existed because the members were indeed friendly . . . to one another. The newbies felt like they crashed a private party when they came to a new church.

Imagine that I'm a first-time visitor to Brecksville UCC. The front door is locked, so I guess I'll try the side door. Nope. Back door? Yep. Now that I'm inside, do I go upstairs or downstairs? How do I find the entrance to the sanctuary? Did anyone greet us? Introduce themselves? Provide name tags? Oops, I need to go to the bathroom, but I'm embarrassed to ask where it is, so I'll wander about. I see people talking to each other, will someone come over and talk to me?

*(Continued on next page)*

## From Pastor John (continued)

People are moving downstairs after the service, I wonder why. Will anyone tell me what's going on downstairs? Now I'm at the table with coffee, will anyone join me? Seeing the experience from a guest's perspective can help us all to express the kind welcome we want everyone to feel.

Most importantly, do we wear our name tags? This is the most common request I hear from our newest members. Everybody seems to know everybody; they even know the names of the new members. But the new members are learning a hundred names, even months later. It's awkward to ask, "what's your name again?" We can make things easier. Donning our name tags every Sunday goes a long way toward building friendships and feeling like a welcoming community.

A retired minister shared his experience of visiting a new church. True story. No one welcomed him. No one handed him a bulletin so he didn't know the hymn numbers. He was "greeted" by just one couple; they told him that this was their pew and he had to sit somewhere else. He never returned. Neither would I.

That did not happen here, thank God; and thank you. You have a strong tradition of being a welcoming church. Please keep it up. We have greeters and ushers. We have clear signs to help guests find their way around. There is no substitute for that warm friendly personal encounter with someone who actually cares, actually listens, actually helps each individual to feel loved and welcomed. Every one of us can live our call to discipleship in that way.

Please continue to be that kind of welcoming church. In all these ways, we become a nurturing, growing community that is based in love and lives the radical inclusivity and hospitality shown by Jesus.

-- Rev. John King

## From The Moderator

The reports submitted by the ministries contain the key events and details for each area. So as not to be overly repetitive, only major events are listed below.

- John King was installed as the pastor effective February 1st. We remain grateful to Allan Lane for his service as Interim Minister, particularly as it was longer than expected due to the pandemic.
- Covid precautions were significantly reduced and/or removed over the course of the year, and have settled into a 'new normal', although attendance remains lower than pre-pandemic levels particularly among the youth. Key events such as Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday services, the Thanksgiving Feast, the Christmas Cantata and the Children's Pageant resumed for the first time since 2019.
- The congregation acknowledged facing two key challenges: shrinking membership and the resulting ongoing budget deficits. These have been discussed at several congregational meetings and will continue to be a focus in 2023.
  - Shrinking membership is a problem across most communities of faith regardless of denomination. John has helped bring a different view and approach to addressing this challenge, but the congregation as a whole will need to bring to bear all ideas, working together to grow.
  - Church income is directly related to membership. Council continues to manage to very tight budgets and there is very little room left for meaningful decrease without significant negative impact. The proposed budget for 2023 will show a deficit, as it has for several years. If this continues, the church reserves will be depleted within 3-5 years.

-- Sue Maier, Moderator

# Annual Report for 2022

## Music

Respectfully submitted by Dave Debick on January 5, 2023

The end of January brought to a close the interim ministry of Rev. Allan Lane, who faithfully saw the congregation through the Covid-19 pandemic, and also kept us on course during the search process for our new settled pastor. On Feb. 1, Brecksville United Church of Christ welcomed the Rev. John King as our new permanent pastor; the actual installation took place on Feb. 20. I am glad to report that Pastor John has been a pleasure and inspiration to work with.

I'd like to recognize the following members for their contributions to BUCC's music ministry: Rose Kaval and Allison Colbert joined the adult choir; on many occasions, Craig Ramsey has shared his extensive musical gifts on guitar, percussion, and vocals. We are blessed with three fine flute players: Becky Anderson, Erin Tomlinson, and Betsey Wilson, all of whom generously shared their time and talent during 2022. Bob Chandler has done an outstanding job on percussion all year; other percussionists included Kathy Smith and Diane Gressley. We have several veteran singers in the choir whom I'd like to acknowledge: sopranos Anne Melfo, Diane Gressley, Evelyn Seager, and Kathy Smith; altos Bridget Sproul and Jan Renovetz; tenor Jill Zedan; and basses Jon Thompson and Cliff Cribbs. I cannot thank these members enough for their dedication and perseverance—through good weather and very bad. And I'd also like to give a shout-out to our seasonal choir volunteers: Doug Wrights, Sue Maier and Mary Pat Murphy.

The anchors of the Joyful Noise choir (grades K-5) during 2022 were Gabby and Giuliana Gagliano. Several other children participated over the course of the year: Arthur and Dorothy Cook, Natalie and Mira Corrado, Mackenzie Oliver (granddaughter of Dave and Julie Bernard), Amelia Tyler, Grace, Lily, and Maxwell Hunt, Evelyn and Peter Kuzmins, and Sean, Robbie, and Davis Tomlinson.

I think the musical highlight of 2022 was Easter Sunday (4/17). The recorder/dulcimer ensemble played the prelude, ***Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia*** (based on a traditional Tanzanian melody) with Betsey and Becky playing flute, Craig on guitar, and Bob on percussion. Carrie Coyer-Westerberg played trumpet on several numbers. The Joyful Noise choir sang a traditional East African song titled, ***Jesus Is Alive Today***. The choir sang a jubilant piece by Mozart called ***To God Be Joyful***. And we rounded out our selections with ***Away with Gloom, Away with Doubt!***, a contemporary, upbeat song by Dave D. And to top things off, Shani Diggs played timpani for the hymns and the Mozart.

Another musical highlight was the Christmas cantata, ***Adore Him***, presented on Dec. 11. I was ill that morning and struggling with flu A and, as it turned out, AFib. I cannot commend the choir, instrumentalists, and narrators highly enough for their excellent delivery of the music and narration that morning. My sister-in-law Sylvia commented later that week, "You're so used to leading the choir. This time they carried you. And that's a wonderful thing." Amen to that!

In closing, let me say how grateful I am to be working at BUCC as your music director. More than any other factor, it has been the *people* here who make my ministry such a joy to perform. May God bless us all in 2023 with good health, happiness, and peace of mind and soul.

## Christian Education

Chair: Mindy Harris-Wade

Our Sunday school program has probably changed the most, during the first full year of being re-opened. While there are several members of our congregation who are willing to lead classes/events, attendance ranges from 1 – 9 children on a weekly basis.

The Wolbert-Klonowski's offered a youth group for the junior high/high school aged kids, but too many have jobs and sports commitments.

In April, we saw the return of the Easter egg hunt, which was attended by 25-30 kids! In December, 12 kids participated in the Christmas pageant, entitled "*Adore Him, Part II*". We received assistance with these events from Lindsey Maier and Heidi Spangler.

We are open to all suggestions re: ways to bring our kids back into church.

-- Submitted By Anne Melfo

## Communication & Outreach

Submitted by Jim Duffy

**Members:** Allison Colbert, Ben Rehling (through August), Tim Wallis & Jim Duffy (Chair)

Our outreach efforts centered around various online media:

- Our website, [www.BrecksvilleUCC.org](http://www.BrecksvilleUCC.org) , where we post news articles and promote our services and other activities. During 2022, we had 10,810 views by 3,376 visitors.
- Our YouTube Channel, Brecksville United Church of Christ, automatically archives and makes available each week's service.
  - We have 72 subscribers to the channel.
  - Over the course of the year our services were viewed 2,133 times for over 600 hours.
  - The most watched video (163 views) was a wedding held in our sanctuary and the second most (85 views) was February 6, 2022 (Rev. John King's first service with us as Pastor) and the third most watched was Bill Toneff's Memorial Service (77 views).
  - We have a small but dedicated AV team who broadcast our services.
- Our Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/BrecksvilleUCC> which we use to promote events.
- Our Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/buccmembership> which is a "members only" group that we use to communicate with our members.

To reach out beyond our walls, we helped to promote two "community outreach" events: A Post Card Writing Event in June and the "Fall Fest Meal", which was catered by students from Tri-C's culinary department in October.

We also acquired 5 additional socially progressive banners to supplement our famous "Rainbow Flag," in rotation over the front entrance.

# Annual Report for 2022

## Facilities

Submitted by Cliff Cribbs

**Members:** Cliff Cribbs, Tim Wallis, Doug Fawcett, Marge Culver, Dan Stewart and James Tyler

- NJM Landscaping was contracted at \$75.00 per week to provide lawn service.
- Blue Sky Gardening was contracted to maintain the flower beds.
- The parking lot was repaired, coated and stripped at a cost of \$12,300.
- The gutters on the educational wing and the rental property on Arlington were cleaned, with a cost of \$400.
- The lights in the narthex were replaced with LED fixtures costing \$1500.
- A pulley system was installed on the front (exterior) of the church to make it easier to replace the banners.
- Snow removal was contracted with Steve's Material and Supply.
- Various inspections were conducted during the year including: boilers, fire alarm system, elevator, dishwasher, etc.

Thank you to the following for serving on the Facilities Ministry: Tim Wallis, Doug Fawcett, Marge Culver, Dan Stewart, James Tyler and Cliff Cribbs.

## Finance

Submitted by William Witt – Chair

**Members:** Rev. John King, Fred Pedersen, Heide Spangler (Treasurer), Bruce McCain, Nora Gagliano, Joy Garapic ( Financial Sec.), Sherrill Witt (Recording Secretary), Wes Novak (Financial Sec.), Nancy Stella & Vince Kaval.

The Finance Ministry had 3 main functions this year:

1. Implementation of the more advanced church-specific financial software from ACS Technologies and the Tithely product (part of Breeze). These programs enable us to organize and report to Council the financials portion of Church operations. To that end, Wes Novak and Joy Garapic track the collection of pledges & donations and then pay our vendors. This data is turned into working reports for the monthly Council meetings. In addition, on a weekly basis, our Church Secretary, Anne Melfo deposits all checks & currency to the PNC bank branch located at 8959 Brecksville Rd. (a short walk from the Church). We believe that the finances of the church have become more organized this year.

2. With the information gathered above the Ministry was able to have a serious discussion regarding the rapidly depleting church cash reserves, a situation which has existed for more than 10 years but has been rarely talked about. The Ministry recommended greater transparency with the congregation about this matter and the information was presented to the members on October 30, 2022 as part of Stewardship. The Ministry will also present a monthly report in the Pillar a summary statement of Cash Available vs. Reserves.

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## Finance *(continued)*

3. An action plan was also put forth on October 30th which included the following requests to our members as a means to grow our church into the future:

- Encourage greater giving within the congregation with a suggested increase of \$100 per month per household per year.
- Increase the use of online giving to assure a steady stream of recurring funds on a monthly basis.
- Invite people they know or meet to experience our church (either in person or on YouTube) and our new dynamic Pastor John King whose weekly message is powerful and relatable.
- Continue sending letters of invitation out to new families in the area as well as hosting events to raise our community profile.
- Explore additional charitable giving strategies.

The Finance Ministry looks forward to further implementing these strategies in 2023.

## Membership

Submitted by Heidi Spangler

It was such a joy to be part of the Membership ministry in 2022. It was a year of change as we moved back to adding social events to the BUCC calendar. One of the things we focused on was keeping the events fun, but also adding educational and social justice elements to them. Together we watched an educational film with the Maltz Museum, ate strawberry shortcake and learned to make strawberry jam, wrote postcards in opposition to House Bill 616, and enjoyed a fall meal prepared by the students in the Tri-C culinary program. Many thanks to everyone who helped with these events.

## Our Church's Wider Mission

Submitted by Kate Klonowski

### **Collections for 2022 (we continue our tradition of being a "5 for 5" church)**

- One Great Hour of Sharing - \$1,520
- Strengthen the Church - \$145
- Edna House/Mother's Day - \$611 & 2 bags of women's clothing
  - Jenn Lasky, ED, came to speak on May 1st at the beginning of service
- Women's Education Fund/Father's Day (NEW THIS YEAR)
  - Pastor John has been providing tuition to a student (Lupita) in El Salvador
    - Lupita's father, Gorge, spoke and answered questions after the service In Pilgrim Hall (via zoom)
    - Leveraged into a general fund for supporting the education of women
- Neighbors in Need - \$401
- Christmas Collection - TBD
- Church donation to National Wider Mission Ministries – \$9,100 (7.5% paid quarterly)

## Our Church's Wider Mission *(continued)*

### Hunger Meals (have been lower numbers in the months since COVID)

- PRUMC on 2/27 – Served 20
- Iglesia Emmanuel on 6/5 – Served 10
- Iglesia Emmanuel on 9/4 – Served 13
- Iglesia Emmanuel on 11/6 – Served 14

### Sock-it-to-Me Sundays

- Over 60 bags of men's, women's & children's socks donated to local shelters in 2022

### New Initiatives

- Election reform – voter suppression, electoral maps, midterms
  - Ann Kelly has begun a monthly letter-writing initiative that began with encouraging underrepresented individuals to vote
  - Expanded to include additional areas of concern identified by BUCC members (the most recent being the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act)
- Pastor John has been providing tuition to a student (Lupita) in El Salvador & the BUCC community has offered to support this effort as well by initiating a Women's Education Fund (which can also be used to support others who may seek our support).
- Spencer Whyte has a friend in grad school (Wania) whose family is displaced from Afghanistan and requested financial support for legal fees to maintain her visa status and avoid deportation and complete her graduate studies. \$750 was raised quickly by church members to resolve her immediate crisis.
- Looking into local refugee supports (Refugee Response as well as others)
- Collaborated with Heidi Spangler on a postcard writing event to state reps and senators opposing Ohio House Bill 616 ("Don't Say Gay"). Membership/OCWM/CE co-sponsored.

Possible membership to the Goods Bank NEO for 2023 to support people in need by providing necessities at a significantly lower cost than retail.

## Spiritual Life

**Members:** Allison Colbert, Rose Kaval, Anne Melfo, Sue Maier, Kathy Smith, Betsey Wilson (Chair)

As a relatively inexperienced but nonetheless enthusiastic team, this iteration of Spiritual Life members certainly learned A LOT in 2022.

We followed the CDC's recommendations and eased COVID restrictions, removing the blue separation tape from pews, while keeping the "Social Distancing" posters and hand sanitizer stations.

In February we teamed up with Communication & Outreach to produce a "How to Head Usher" video, available to watch and learn on our member Facebook page. We are so grateful to Anne Melfo and Jim Duffy for tackling this much-needed project!

In April it was time to bring Communion back. We wanted to combine the hygienic nature of single-sized cup/bread servings and the personal touch of intinction, so congregants are invited to the front of the church to receive individual elements. The Wrights, who have been preparing Communion since 1991, stepped aside and Gayle Colbert didn't hesitate to step up. This ministry couldn't be more thankful or grateful to all three of them for their service, past and present.

## **Spiritual Life** *(continued)*

Our beloved Lenten traditions of Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday Soup Suppers resumed. It was a joy to break bread together again as a church family after a long hiatus. One thing's for sure, we're still the absolute best at meaningful and celebratory dining!

We continue to try to find ways to encourage members and friends to regularly check in to Breeze to see how they can serve the church on Sundays and special events; we are definitely gaining momentum in this area!

New promotional flyers were designed and printed over the summer. In addition to replacing the dated pew flyers, Pastor John is mailing them to new residents in several targeted zip codes on a semi-monthly basis.

A new All Souls Day Service allowed us to formally celebrate the lives of loved ones and members who've moved on in the past year. It was a meaningful service that will be continued in the future.

These are just some of the challenges and projects we attacked last year; we were busy all the time. I'm overjoyed to say that the entire ministry has agreed to serve again in 2023; we might actually know what we're doing now (but don't quote me on that!). I am thankful for Allison, Rose, Anne and Kathy; their dedication to BUCC knows no bounds. I'm especially grateful to Sue Maier for easing me into the chair responsibilities of this ministry and for agreeing to continue as an active participant. Working with Dave Debick and Rev. John King made the transition from what could have been an overwhelming post-pandemic, new-minister church life as seamless and laughter-filled as possible.

Thank you to my church family for allowing me/pushing me to grow in so many different ways!

Betsey Wilson, Spiritual Life Chair

## **Staff / Congregation Relations**

Submitted by Evie Novak

**Members:** Cliff Cribbs, Marge Culver, Mike Westerberg, Sherrill Witt

**Chairperson:** Evie Novak

2022 was another busy year for the ministry. Our focus this year was in five primary areas:

### **Departure of Interim Pastor Rev Allan Lane:**

Following the call of Pastor John King, it was agreed that Allan would continue his service until January 30. The terms of his departure were negotiated. An exit interview was conducted on January 20 with Allan, Sherrill Witt and Jim Duffy. An interview summary was sent to Rev. Nayiri Karjian, Assoc. General Minister for Living Water Association.

### **Welcome of Pastor John King:**

Rev John King's service began on February 1, 2022. We met weekly with John for the first month to discuss multiple topics including member feedback, dress attire, sermon content, office equipment, duties, and responsibilities. Rev. John introduced us to a resource document for SCR, A Sure Foundation, which we agreed to adopt. Using this resource, we developed Healthy Communication Procedures for the staff and congregation.

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## **Staff / Congregation Relations** *(continued)*

This was approved by Council and distributed via the May Pillar. It can be found on the BUCC website under the Archives tab – Other publications – Congregational Repository – Ministries - Staff Congregation Relations.

### **Annual Employment Reviews:**

Annual end of year staff reviews for office manager and music director were completed in part by each employee and in part by Rev John King. SCR completed the annual performance review for Rev John King. They were not only used to obtain feedback from and provide feedback to the staff but were also used in providing compensation recommendations to Council for the 2023 year.

### **Staff Meetings:**

Midyear meetings were conducted with the Pastor and program staff in June to discuss any concerns that needed to be addressed and evaluate if goals were being met. End of year meetings were held in December to discuss annual performance reviews and compensation for 2023.

### **Miscellaneous Personnel Tasks:**

- We ensured that the 2021 Annual Congregational Report was completed and distributed to members.
- Email blast guidelines were introduced to the congregation members in January.
- We submitted a Staff Feature Article for each employee to the Pillar with fun facts about each of them, to allow members to know the staff on a more personal level.
- We reviewed monthly time sheets, vacation & sick time requests submitted by Anne Melfo, Office Manager. We also conducted an analysis of her 2021-2022 work hours for budgeting purposes and adjusted them accordingly.
- We addressed a few staff-member concerns.
- We again considered and discussed with Council the timing for hiring a new Nursery worker. We initiated a volunteer program and added the position to Breeze. It was later determined that a regular volunteer was probably not necessary. We have placed an announcement in the Bulletin for members to let us know if they would like to utilize the nursery so that we can secure a volunteer.
- We celebrated David Debick's 20th Anniversary on Aug 28, during coffee hour.
- Considered and submitted staff budget proposals for 2023.
- We assisted the Finance ministry with changes in benefits for staff members.
- We replaced the staff holiday of President's Day with Juneteenth. It will be celebrated on June 19 unless the date falls on a weekend, then it will be observed on the Friday before or Monday after. The Employee Handbook was updated. The handbook can also be found in the Congregational Repository on the BUCC website.

## **Stewardship / Leadership Development**

Submitted by Bridget Sproul

At the beginning of 2022, the Stewardship and the Leadership Development ministries joined into one ministry. The new ministry began the year by showing appreciation to outgoing council members and Pastor Allan Lane, as he finished his time as interim Pastor, and by giving a welcome gift to incoming Pastor John King. We finished filling ministries as best we could. We organized our calendar for the year.

Pat Rehm and Carol Miller planned, organized, and ran a butterfly program to end at Pentecost. It included many weeks of growing caterpillars, waiting for the chrysalis to open and to feed butterflies. Many members took part in the activity.

It was decided that we needed to start a program for stewardship of the self. Member Carol VanDuyne began a meditation, mindfulness, and gentle movement class in October. It continued through the rest of the year and into 2023. The group meets on Wednesdays in the Parlor from 11-noon.

On Rally Day we held a ministry sign-up that was unsuccessful. We kicked off the fall stewardship drive. Bridget Sproul, Bill Witt (Finance), and Sue Maier (Moderator) all spoke on different Sundays during the stewardship drive. We ended with our Stewardship Sunday Turkey Dinner, which we did not have the past two years due to the pandemic. It was very well attended. Most of the work was done by our ministry. Free turkeys were donated by Giant Eagle.

November and December were spent attempting to fill officers, ministry chairs, and ministries. It was a big job for the combined ministry. 2022 was a year of transition and change. We look forward to the coming year.

Respectfully submitted,

Bridget Sproul, Chairperson