



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Church Statistics

I. New Members - 28

02-12-2023 Sherrod Brown & Connie Schultz
Jackie Cassara
Jenn, Nate, Amelia & Edison Elting
Ann Kelley
Craig Ramsey
Pat Rolfe
Karen Sandstrom

04-01-23 Suzanne Patrick

09-10-23 Armand Eusanio & Jeff Thompson
Cait Mowery & Chris, Josie & June Hatala
Lois Lorenzo
Kim Smith

09-17-23 Claudia Griesmer
Carolyn Klima
Lori Molesky

11-12-23 Melanie Falls & Tina Posey
Kathy Goshe
Devorah Jones-Klonowski
Mary Kidd

II. Losses - 6

Deaths – 4		Transfers – 2
01-29-2023	Jeanne Cowden	Betty Einhart
04-11-2023	Suzanne Patrick	Pat Rolfe
05-??-2023	Betty Kaul	
05-29-2023	Al Klonowski	

III. Baptisms – 3

03-26-23 Layla Grace Martinez
12-31-23 Johnathan & Noah Richardson

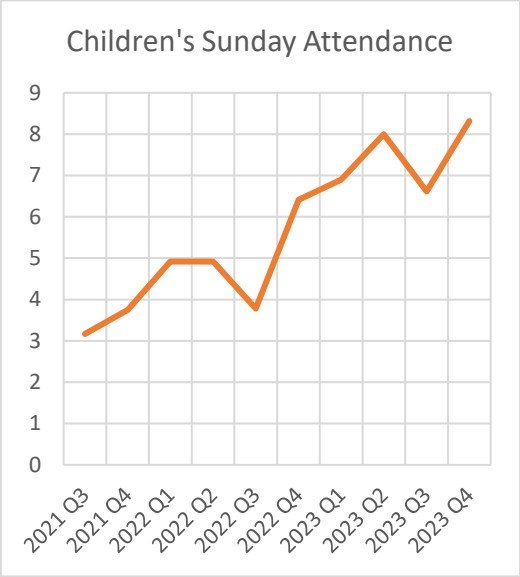
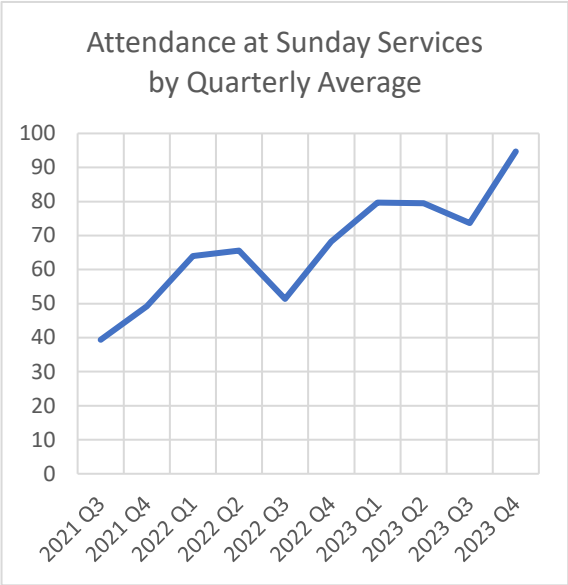
Total Members as of 2/1/2023 **148**
Total Members as of 2/1/2024 **170**

Annual Report for 2023

From Pastor John

Growth happens in various ways. My son grows taller every day. His sister is growing financially, and we're all (in fits and starts) growing emotionally, and spiritually. Brecksville United Church of Christ is also growing in every way that matters.

Attendance is growing steadily as you can see in the chart. Last year alone, we welcomed 28 new members, and celebrated three baptisms. Most new folks tell me they first showed up because someone invited them. They returned because of the hospitality and authenticity of this congregation. Don't underestimate the power of a personal invitation to "come and see." (John 1:39, 46) All of us can share the Good News. When we do, the church grows.

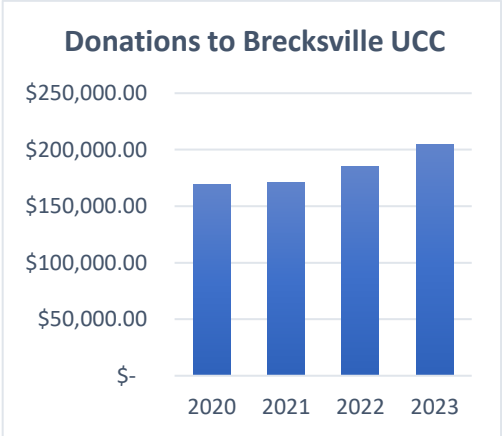


Kids participation is also growing. They bring new life and smiles to the congregation. Kids also bring us new ideas and hope for the future. The charts also indicate a recurring dip in Q3, reflecting summer vacation travels.

Finances are growing. We've had sacred conversations about stewardship. You have stepped up in ways that exceed expectations. When I began here in February 2022, our budget deficit was over \$75,000. This was causing us to spend our reserves at a rate that would leave us financially depleted in just a few years. Last year, that trend reversed. Because of your generous stewardship, you changed that deficit into a \$3,000 surplus! This is an extraordinary manifestation of your faith and commitment to Christ and to this congregation. Thank you.

Our faith is growing on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus' teachings. Over the past year I have made many home visits and hospital visits. As I listen to you, as we study and pray together, we are growing on the path of discipleship. By the bold and beautiful ways that you put your faith into action, our witness to the community grows stronger.

I'm growing too. Yes, around the waistline, but more importantly, I'm growing in the freedom to preach from the heart. Jesus' message is, at core, one of love, acceptance and service. You have helped me to find my voice in a way that is more authentically personal. And I deeply appreciate the ways that you have shared your faith when I open the mic during the sermons. Consistently, I grow by the faith witness you give.



Yes, we are growing. And I am so excited to see the ways that we will continue to grow in the months and years to come.

From The Moderator

The Little Church That Could...And Did!!

This Annual Report contains the individual reports from the Ministries and as I looked at them, I thought of 3 things – Growth, Gratitude and Grace.

Growth: BUCC added 28 new members this year. When people join our church, they are always heard to say, “I have never met such a friendly, welcoming, loving group of people.” The hallmarks of those who join are, indeed, similar to those who welcome them: love, compassion, intelligence, wit, generosity, energy and open minds and hearts. We are truly blessed and thankful that Rev. John King’s message of love has brought these individuals and families to us.

Gratitude: Here is my partial list of highlights and why I am grateful:

- **Music** – David D. & the choir, the Cantata, Mardi Gras, public concerts and meaningful music each week.
- **Finance** – Great reports, better organization and we did not have a deficit for 2023!!
- **BBH Pride participation** showed our support and commitment to the LGBTQ+ community.
- **The City of Brecksville** happily approved our signage deviation request, thanks to member Pat Walker and her pro bono work for us.
- **Stewardship** ran a highly successful pledge campaign to put us on better footing for 2024.
- **Spiritual Life** took us outdoors in August for a wonderful service & picnic.
- **The Parlor** got fresh, new carpeting from The Community of St. Bridget.
- **The Flood on July 20th** showed us, again, what a gift from God we have in Sam Alai (and Cliff Cribbs) and that we have a wonderful company insuring our Church.
- **A Grant from Living Water Association** will widen our marketing and message to more potential members.
- **Communications and Outreach** is taking our circle of influence & messaging beyond our sanctuary and front doors, as well as improving our streaming, social media and audio-visual capabilities.

Grace is sometimes defined as the honoring of someone or something by one’s presence. Every member and visitor to this church every Sunday honors our loving God, our amazing congregation and the 200+ year spirit and history of BUCC on Public Square in Brecksville. Thank you to each of you for your Grace in supporting this church.

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Music

Respectfully submitted by Dave Debick

Thanks to our many dedicated volunteer singers and instrumentalists, 2023 was a very successful year musically at Brecksville UCC!

Choir highlights included the services during Holy Week and the Christmas cantata on Dec. 10. An anonymous donor provided funds for new sheet music for the cantata, and the piece chosen, **Sing Christmas**, incorporated a delightful blend of contemporary and traditional music.

Our Youth Choir sings periodically at Sunday services depending on the availability of the children. Their efforts are always appreciated by the congregation.

Our free concert series featured the Oberlin Jazz Quartet on April 16, and the Tri-C Western Campus Concert Band and Chorale on October 29. Both programs were well-received and -attended. The receptions that follow our free concerts – coordinated for many years now by Sue Stenzel – are marvelous tributes to the spirit of hospitality and welcome we strive to witness to the broader Brecksville community.

During the summer months, volunteer singers and instrumentalists share their musical gifts on Sundays so that the choirs can enjoy some time off. As always, there were plenty of volunteers, and their selection of music was eclectic and well-received.

In closing, I'd like to thank all our volunteer musicians at BUCC who generously share their time and talent for the spiritual and musical inspiration of the congregation. It is an honor and pleasure to work with such amazing people!

Respectfully submitted by David Debick, Director of Music at Brecksville UCC, on January 12, 2024.

Christian Education

Submitted by Anne Melfo

Members: Mindy Harris-Wade (Chair), Robin Coyer, Leroy Ford, Nora Gagliano, Anne Melfo, Pat Rehm, Susan Snyder, Val Tyler

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 – 12 children on a weekly basis.

In April, we saw the return of the Easter egg hunt, which was attended by 25-30 kids! In December, 18 kids participated in the Christmas pageant, entitled "*Holy Night*". Once again, we received assistance with these events from Heidi Spangler and the parents.

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Communication & Outreach

Submitted by Jim Duffy

Members: Jim Duffy (Chair), Allison Colbert, Jenn Elting, Fred Pedersen, Heidi Spangler & Tim Wallis.

Our outreach efforts centered around various online media:

- Our website, www.BrecksvilleUCC.org, is where we post news articles and promote our services and other activities. During 2023, we had 10,885 views by 3,872 visitors.
- Our YouTube Channel, Brecksville United Church of Christ, automatically archives and makes available each week's service.
 - We have 115 subscribers to the channel.
 - Over the course of the year our services were viewed 3,618 times for over 635 hours.
 - The most watched video (92 views) was "10-Dec-2023 Sunday Service with Christmas Cantata" and the second most (82 views) was "Meet David Debick" and the third most watched (80 views) was "Memorial Service for Suzanne Patrick".
 - We have a small but dedicated AV team who broadcast our services.
 - This year we were able to upgrade our microphones, cameras and sound system, thanks to a generous donation from the Duncan Memorial Fund.
- Our Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/BrecksvilleUCC>, which we use to promote events, has 220 followers, up from 193 in 2022.
- Our Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/buccmembership>, is a "members only" group that we use to communicate with BUCC's congregation. The group has 116 members, up from 112 in 2022.

We engaged the services of a talented marketing intern: Charles Nance, who designed new logos for BUCC so that we could "rebrand" our website, YouTube and Facebook presence. He took wonderful pictures and shot "Member Highlights" videos designed to introduce our congregation to others. Heidi Spangler began making weekly sermon and musical offering videos, extracted from our worship service videos. These were very helpful to our outreach efforts.

To reach out further, we helped to promote these "community outreach" events to invite people inside our walls:

- Postcard Writing event against proposed legislation (HB51) to weaken gun controls.
- Spring Jazz Concert & Fall Choral Concert
- Cleveland Pride Parade
- BBH Pride events

Our socially progressive banners to supplement our famous "Rainbow Flag" in rotation over the front entrance, ran into an issue with the City of Brecksville. When someone filed a complaint to the city, it was noted that our banners were not in compliance with Brecksville sign ordinances. In December, the City Council approved our request for an exception, so that we can continue displaying our banners in front of the church building. Thanks to long time member, Pat Walker for her extraordinary assistance throughout this process, and thanks to the church members who attended multiple meetings at City Hall.

Finally, Pastor John applied for and received a \$10,000 Church Development and Vitality grant from the UCC Living Waters Association. We plan to use those funds over the next 3 years to fund outreach on Ideastream (WKSU and WCLV) and other media outlets.

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Facilities

Submitted by Cliff Cribbs

Members: Cliff Cribbs (Chair), Marge Culver, Kathy Pastor, Tim Wallis, Dan Stewart, and Eric Rahnenfuehrer

- The carpeting in the sanctuary and rear entrance was professionally cleaned.
- The Community of Saint Bridget paid for the replacement and installation of the parlor carpeting.
- Parlor, Narthex and Ed Wing lighting were upgraded to cost efficient LED.
- Rear entrance lights and parking lot lights were repaired.
- A new member bulletin board was installed in the narthex.
- Rental rate for Arlington house (unit B) was raised.
- Rear entrance signage was added over the portico.
- The lower level (Pilgrim Hall and the educational wing) flooded. Our flood insurance covered all damage minus a \$1000 deductible. All storm sewers were cleaned.
- The electric stove in Unit B (Arlington rental) was replaced.
- The dishwasher in Unit A (Arlington rental) was replaced.
- The women's toilet in the lower education wing was repaired.
- The heating system required several repairs.

Fellowship

Members: Chad Sproul (Chair), Robin Coyer, Dave Pastor, Annette Pedersen, Kathy Smith, Sherrill Witt, Jill Zedan

No report received.

Finance

Submitted by William Witt – Chair

Members: Vince Kaval (Treasurer), Joy Garapic (Financial Secretary), Wes Novak, Nancy Stella, Fred Pedersen, Bruce McCain & Sherrill Witt (Rec. Sec.)

The Finance Ministry oversees all ongoing financial reports, including preparing and presenting monthly reports to Council and the Annual BUCC Budget, as well as monitoring all monies flowing in and out of BUCC Bank Accounts, Investment Accounts and the United Church Fund.

In 2023 BUCC continued with the implementation of the new financial software and we believe this has resulted in clearer and more detailed reporting for both Finance and Council. The monthly Dashboard in the Pillar has raised awareness of our Cash Available vs. Reserves, which spells out how many years the church can go forward with current income/spending rates.

The original 2023 Budget forecasted a \$70,000 deficit for December 2023, and we are pleased to report that we ended the year on the plus side by \$2973!! This is due to many encouraging factors:

- The addition of 28 new members thanks to Rev. John King and his positive messages of God's love and Welcome.
- Very generous Sunday donations during the final quarter of 2023.

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- The increase in value of equities gifted to our church with partial sales made to cover current expenses and to add to cash reserves.
- The increase in value in our separate account with United Church Funds.
- The hard work put in by Katie MacKeigan King to transfer family health coverage from BUCC to her current employer, thus saving BUCC \$20,000+ annually.
- A stellar Stewardship Drive in November which brought us the highest average per family donation amount and highest total pledge amount in many years. This will give us a strong start for 2024.
- The generosity of so many members who donate their time to make necessary small repairs around the church, their funds to buy coffee, creamers, flowers, decorations, etc. and their creative/organizational talents for making the church so welcoming for special events.

The Finance Ministry looks forward to building on all these positive signs for fiscal 2024.

Our Church's Wider Mission

Submitted by Rob Grow

I apologized, but I never collected the amounts that we collected from the various offerings of the church. Someone else would have that information. I am sorry, but I do not. We participated in two hunger meals over the past year. Approximately twenty were served each time. We are going to become active in some new initiatives such as the Poor People's Campaign and we are going to be having a tree planting in March. New members to the Ministry are Armand Eusano, Paul Kuzmins, Dave Shackle and Melanie Falls.

Spiritual Life

Submitted by Betsey Wilson

Members: Allison Colbert, Dave Debick, Peg Duffy, Rose Kaval, Rev. John King, Sue Maier, Kate Matthews, Anne Melfo, Karen Sandstrom, Evelyn Seiger and Kathy Smith.

2023 was another busy year for this team of dedicated ministry members. In addition to managing all the traditional holiday observances and celebrations, we oversaw a tricky Sunday Christmas Eve service, stepped up our attention to sanctuary décor (Pentecost), and provided coverage for Pastor John's unexpected fall absence.

In June we joyfully returned to twice a month communion, something the church hadn't had since before the pandemic. We are so grateful to Gayle Colbert for quietly preparing the elements month in and month out.

A first ever was our combined Worship in the Park/Church Picnic celebration at Sagamore Hills Park. What a huge success! We also ventured outside several times during the warm summer months for fellowship hour, which was a lot of fun and provided valuable community marketing for the church.

Music Director Dave Debick oversaw two well-attended musical performances, the Oberlin Jazz Quartet in April and the Tri-C West Chorus/Tri-C Community Band in October.

The BUCC name tags were re-designed, printed and assembled, a daunting task Sue Maier took on with cheerful goodwill, and our friend Leroy Ford created a meaningful mug memorial tree for our cherished members in Fellowship Hall.

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Rob Grow and Kate Matthews generously filled in (on short notice!) for Pastor John when he was out for knee surgery.

Many members contributed to our annual and beloved Advent Devotional, a task we can't thank Anne Melfo enough for pulling together.

As you can see, we were always busy! I am grateful to ministry members Allison Colbert, Dave Debick, Peg Duffy, Rose Kaval, Rev. John King, Sue Maier, Kate Matthews, Anne Melfo, Karen Sandstrom, Evelyn Seiger and Kathy Smith.

Respectfully, Betsey Wilson (Chair)

Staff / Congregation Relations

Submitted by Annette Pedersen

Members: Cliff Cribbs, Marge Culver, Kathy Ford, Sherrill Witt, Evie Novak,
Annette Pedersen (Chair)

A member graciously agreed to take minutes for the Staff Congregation Relations (SCR) Ministry Meetings which was greatly appreciated.

The Office Manager is retaining the responsibility of preparing the church bulletin.

We thought BUCC was going to lose our Financial Secretary because of a move. A member of the Congregation began learning the role. We were delighted when she decided to stay on at BUCC.

The Ministry Chairs received a copy of the Healthy Communication Procedure in the early part of 2023 and were reminded to contact SCR with any staff/member concerns.

The Mission statement on the website for SCR was revisited and remains current with no update needed.

In May SCR was notified by CE that a new Nursery Care Attendant was hired for the summer and she had planned to go away to college in August. A volunteer member of the Congregation filled in as the Nursery Care Attendant when she left. 2024's Budget includes hiring a Nursery Care Attendant.

The Church also had a summer intern that helped the Communications Ministry and the church's branding.

As in the past we reviewed monthly time sheets, vacation & sick time requests submitted by the Office Manager to ensure they remained within budget. We addressed a few staff-member concerns. Church Security was an important topic discussed this year for the church and was also included within this ministry's meetings. Midyear staff meetings began with the staff in June and followed with the Minister in July. End of year staff meetings were held in November and December to discuss annual performance reviews and compensation for 2024.

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Stewardship / Leadership Development

Submitted by Bridget Sproul

Early in 2023, we had discussions about a New Member Orientation group. Later in the year we also discussed a Bridging Group to help newer members bridge to UCC from other denominations. This is still under consideration as we move into 2024.

The Receptions Role was more clearly defined. A list of volunteers to help when a reception occurs has been created.

All ministries were encouraged to update their bulletin boards. Thanks to all who did!

New name tags were designed and printed by Sue Maier. They have the member's name as well as the ministries and activities the member is involved in.

Carol Miller and Pat Rehm provided caterpillars again this spring for folks to raise to butterflies and release.

A veggie and fruit table was available during the harvest season for members to donate from their gardens for other members to purchase. All funds went to lower the deficit.

This year's Stewardship Drive was titled "Because of You, Our Church Changes Lives." Supplies were ordered and received from the UCC. We had 5 bulletin inserts and a poster. This year we designed and used our own pledge cards. We had 4 speakers during the Sunday services in October and November. They were Bridget Sproul, Sherrill Witt, Jim Duffy, and Kate Matthews. Many thanks!

Our Stewardship Turkey Dinner was on Nov 12. The Fellowship Ministry handled the sign-up lists. Both ministries decorated and set up the dinner. Jon Langham cooked and prepared the six turkeys donated by Giant Eagle. We should consider another source for next year.

Bridget Sproul attended a security workshop with Sherrill Witt. FEMA offers grants to churches for physical enhancements and activities.

Officers will remain the same for 2024. An adjustment was made to the Christian Education Ministry. Pat Rehm will be the Chairperson who reports to council. Mindy Wade-Harris will continue to manage the Children's Education subcommittee. Leroy Ford, with the help of Pat Rehm, will manage the Adult Education subcommittee. Many more members have joined ministries for 2024!

The Stewardship Drive was a big success! 51 pledges for \$183,384! Average pledge of about \$3600. The median pledge was about \$2000. Most pledges were between \$500-\$1500. Five members gave \$10,000+. We ended 2023 with about \$3000 in the black for the first time in a very long time.

Respectfully submitted,

Bridget Sproul
Ministry Chairperson