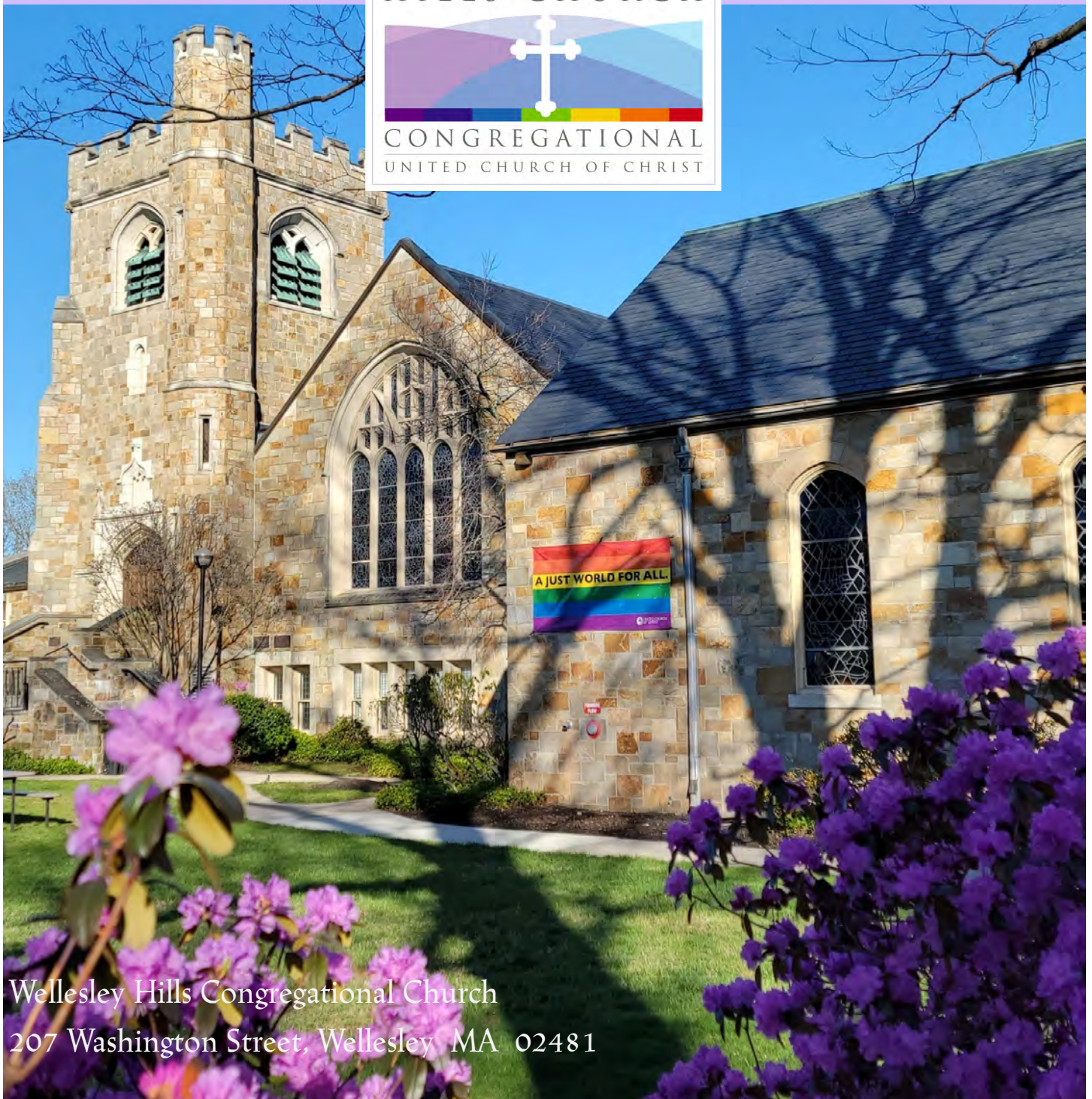


# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



Wellesley Hills Congregational Church  
207 Washington Street, Wellesley MA 02481

# 2022 Annual Report

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## *Message from Rev. Jonathan Page*

What a delight it is for me to begin my tenure as your settled Senior Minister! I am overjoyed to return to the Hills Church after many years. This congregation formed me in the Christian faith, and I look forward to many years of fruitful ministry with you all. I'd like to thank everyone who has made my transition a smooth one. Special thanks is owed to the Search Committee and to the remarkable staff at WHCC.

As I look toward 2023, I have three main priorities for the upcoming year:

1) To get to know each and every member of the church. This year I will reach out to you to set up meetings where I can hear about your faith journey and your passions as followers of Jesus. The heart and soul of any congregation is the membership and WHCC is blessed to have such talented, engaged, and loving members.

2) To work with the staff and the Membership Ministry Team to improve our outreach to the community and to streamline a system for welcoming visitors. This will involve the selection of a new database for the church and a coherent plan for new member integration.

3) To work with the staff and the Faith Formation Support Board to strengthen our Adult Education program and small group ministries. The Congregational tradition has always been one that celebrates the life of the mind and the importance of having a well thought out faith. The bonds that link us together as the body of Christ are nurtured in small groups. I hope that everyone in the church can have at least one ministry they are involved with outside Sunday worship.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns you might have. My door is always open and I relish conversations and critiques of our work. By working together we can continue to have a thriving and robust church.

**Rev. Jonathan Page**  
**Senior Minister**





# 2022 Annual Report

## INTERIM CO-SENIOR PASTORS

Dear Friends,

We began 2022 with Wellesley Hills transitions underway. With the work of the Transition Committee completed, the search for your new settled minister was just beginning. In addition to our regular pastoral responsibilities, our work remained focused on personnel. We completed reviews with the existing staff and continued to work with the Personnel Committee on five hires: Senior Minister, Office Manager, Bookkeeper, Director of Music, and new daytime Facilities Manager. With the process for the call to a new Senior Minister in place, work began with the Deacons to create a Music Discernment Committee. As we write this, we anticipate that MusD will submit their report to the Deacons this evening. It includes an assessment of the needs of the congregation and recommendations to guide the Deacons in the search for a new Director of Music. Additionally, the church welcomed a new Office Manager, Andrea Bellarosa; Bookkeeper, Jessica Bliss; and Facilities Manager, Joe Brady. We especially rejoice in the election of Senior Minister, Rev. Jonathan Page. A special “thank you” to Steven Hopkins who “patched us through” March, April and May while we searched for a new Office Administrator.

Like congregations across the country, the Omicron variant of Covid caused Hills Church to “pause” its resumption of in-person activities in January 2022. However, on-line worship continued as did Zoom meetings of church groups. We would like to lift up a well-attended Zoom viewing and discussion of the documentary, *“Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North.”* *“Traces of the Trade”* documents descendants of the largest slave-trading family in early America facing their past. More than fifty people from the congregation participated in the first viewing that included a conversation with Dr. James DeWolf Perry, one of the descendants seen in the documentary. There was enough interest that there was a second viewing and conversation in February. We are grateful for the congregation’s determination to remain in fellowship throughout the pandemic by quickly adjusting to the need for online, outdoor and hybrid gatherings. With an anonymous gift, we added additional cameras, so our online worship was more engaging. We even shared “Holy Donuts” outdoors after church in anticipation of “Fat Tuesday.”

Omicron began retreating as rapidly as it advanced allowing in-person worship and many activities to resume in February – in time for our observance of Lent and Easter. As we prepared for the transformation promised by Easter, individuals offered stories of transformation or “God-sightings” from their own lives during the Sundays of Lent.

After Easter, a special highlight was Hills Church’s 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary observance. Dr. Susan Walton offered a historical tour of the church, Dr. Laurie Maffly-Kipp led us through the history of New England Evangelical Protestants: *“Abolition, Temperance and Women’s Activism”* in the period following the American Revolution to the founding of this church. The series concluded with Dr. Peggy Bendroth, formerly of the Congregational Library, offering a presentation on the history of the founding of the Orthodox Trinitarian Congregational Church of Grantville. All three events were well supported by the congregation. A special “thank you” to Janeen Hanson and her hard-working crew who created the 175<sup>th</sup> celebration on the weekend of June 11 & 12!

While we welcome with joy new staff members and lay leaders in January, we remember with sadness the loss of our former Moderator, Sarah Pedersen. We are grateful for her faithful service to the ministry of this congregation.

Stewardship was launched with leadership for 2022 and 2023 and is still underway at this time. Part of our

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# 2022 Annual Report

stewardship emphasis included a visit from Rev. David Cleaver-Bartholomew, SNEUCC Director of Stewardship.

The Membership Ministry has been another focus of our ministry at Hills Church. Many thanks to the Spiritual Life team and the Membership Ministry Team that have worked so diligently on updating our membership list and our nametags (no small task!). They have continued to work on welcoming newcomers and prospective members to our community.

The Fall Program year included a return to weekly Sunday morning adult Bible study focusing on the lectionary texts that informed that morning's worship led by Richard Edens. On November 13 we welcomed Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin, SNEUCC minister for Environmental and Economic Justice, to preach, lead a program on environmental justice and challenge Hills Church to be a "Green Congregation."

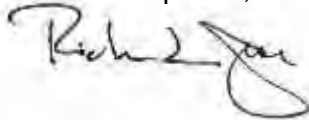
One of the church's great achievements during the interim period has been the creation of the new website. Many thanks to the website team – once again we remember Moderator Sarah Pedersen and her faithful commitment to this critically important work. Special thanks to staff members Rev. Anne Marie Holloway and Andrea Bellarosa, for their skilled and good-natured willingness to help all of us create and utilize this new "front door" to the ministry.

We began a look at security this fall with a meeting with representatives from the Wellesley Police Dept. to make sure that the premises are secure and that all are safe while in our facilities. To that end we are working on securing our locking systems in the building. We also worked on securing employee information with two staff meetings outlining best practices.

An enduring feature of life since 2020 has been the disruptions caused by the Covid epidemic. Many thanks to Chris Stowell and the Re-Opening Task Force for their determination in keeping the congregation safe and informed. We hope that there will be no more shutdowns to our ministries or to the life of the communities beyond our doors. Perhaps time has come when we have learned to live with Covid.

We write this as our tenure as Interim Co-Senior Ministers is coming to its conclusion. Hills Church has called a new Senior Minister, Rev. Jonathan Page, whose ministry begins in the New Year. We have appreciated the opportunity to serve with you during this time of transition and are especially grateful for our staff colleagues who have helped Hills Church thrive in this time of pandemic disruption and staff transitions. May God grant you every blessing in your future ministry!

Grace and peace,



Rev. Dr. Jill Edens      Rev. Richard Edens

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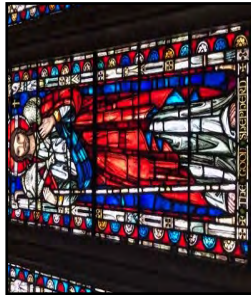
ASSOCIATE MINISTER  
Rev. Judy Swahnberg



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

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

In 2022, we gathered virtually and then in person, sang, preached, listened to the word, celebrated the sacraments of communion and baptism. Our Interim Co-Senior Ministers Rev. Dr. Jill Edens and Rev. Richard Edens & Rev. Anne Marie Holloway, John Finney and Sally Tomasetti and soloists and Hills Bells and staff kept us going!



## I was honored to baptize:

**James Bradley Cretella,**

son of Emma Tomlinson Cretella and Dave Cretella, grandson of Brad Tomlinson

**Sophie Knox,**

daughter of Megan and Ken Knox

**Gwendolyn Klug** at the First Parish, Lincoln,

daughter of Rev. Kit Novotny and Rev. Nate Klug, granddaughter of Carl Novotny & Rev. Judy Swahnberg

## I officiated Memorial Services:

**Bill Whittemore**, March 8, a graveside service at Newton Cemetery

**Ann Clapp**, March 11, a graveside service at Newton Cemetery

**Walter Frey**, memorial service on May 7

**Robert "Bob" Sechrest**, memorial service on May 14

**Percy Lynn Nelson**, graveside service at Newton Cemetery, September 15

**Dorothy-Lee Jones Ward**, memorial service at Doherty Funeral Home, Sept. 22

**Ken Turner**, October 6, memorial service in Wallace Chapel

**Elizabeth Payton**, graveside service, Wildwood Cemetery, Amherst, December 3

**Thomas Bruchez**, December 20, memorial service in Wallace Chapel

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## Assisted at the Memorial Services of:

**Kate Hoffman**, July 26

**Sarah Pedersen**, September 24

Authored the service with Rev. Anne Marie Holloway officiating when I was away:

**Carol Davis Redden**, October 8

Officiated a Wedding: on April 30 of **Victoria Strang and James Buchanon**. Victoria is a graduate of Yale Divinity School and the daughter of **Judith Strang-Waldau**.

OMICRON was a definite zig as the variant of COVID 19 skyrocketed in the Boston wastewater. The Reopening Task Force recommended strategies to keep the flock safe, and we pivoted to remote worship for the month. Fortunately, clergy and worship leaders could continue gathering on Sundays in the sanctuary, and new cameras allowed for livestreaming worship.

Pastoral care and programs now have the option of going virtual, and some groups are finding it more convenient on Zoom. Here is a session of our weekly Morning Mediation, cohosted on Zoom by Mary Hill Canavan and me.



By February, we were back to in-person worship, and rejoiced as little by little more church folks felt comfortable coming back to worship and stopping by the church offices.

Pastoral care continued: I did more in person hospital visits, one on one counseling, led Caring for the Caregiver sessions, Care Team. As always, lots of meetings and planning: Welcoming Diversity and Equity, Racial Justice, Deacons, Church Council, Livestreaming, Reopening Task Force, and Facebook Live Noontime prayers. In the spring I led a thoughtful book discussion of Isabel Wilkerson's book, *CASTE*.



The Seniors Ministry Team and I opted to host a Valentine's Day party on Zoom, with the team delivering candy and cards to all the partygoers. Happily, with COVID numbers down, I was able to visit many of the seniors, too. Say hello to Natalie Garland.

In late spring I spent much time caring for families experiencing loss and preparing for memorial services.

After an administrative vacuum of several months, our stalwart sound tech **Steven Hopkins** accepted an assignment as "temporary part-time administrator" and with savvy and good humor saved many a day. *Thank you, Steven!* Then in late Spring, we welcomed our new ace new Church Administrator, Andrea Bellarosa! *Welcome, Andrea!*

I preached on Palm Sunday and Good Friday and watched as the "Men and Women of the Letters" raised the cross on Good Friday morning with great love and care. *Thank you, all!*

I continued work in the greater church, on the Board of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, mentoring a YDS student, serving on the Board of Ministerial Aid, participating in the review committee for the

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# 2022 Annual Report

Schwartz Center for Compassionate Care national awards.

In May I hosted the first in person social gathering of CONNECTIONS, women's fellowship, in over 2 years... outside, on the church lawn! It was so great to be together!

And speaking of celebrating together...due to Co-Senior Deacon Janeen Hansen's prescient decision to plan an outdoor event for the Hills Church's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and book a tent, and with the weather cooperating, we celebrated!

## June 11, 2022: The Hills Church 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!



Summer 2022 was busy with church life: planning fall events, worship, the joy of meeting the search committee's candidate, a few precious weeks of vacation. We were reminded once again that life is filled with both joys and sorrows when in August, the congregation experienced the sorrow of the death of our beloved church leader and Former Moderator, Sarah Pedersen.

Fall 2022, we welcomed folks back to worship and to church activities!

## The Ordination of Rev. Elizabeth Craft Wooster September 18, 2022



In 2022, Betsy accepted a call to serve the Federated Church, UCC, in Chagrin Falls, Ohio and invited me to preach at her ordination on September 18, at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, Ohio. The Metropolitan Boston Association of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC authorized me to represent the association, and the Hills Church authorized Mary Hill Canavan to represent the Hills Church.

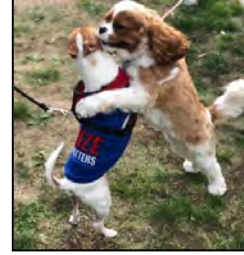


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# 2022 Annual Report

Blessing of the Animals, October 2, 2022



*We celebrate St. Francis of Assisi and Bless the Animals in October! Such Joy!*

**Advent 2022** was filled with worship, music, and planning as Jill and Rick prepared to end their interim responsibilities. The Welcoming DEI group hosted social worker Dana Zias with a terrific introduction to the complexities of using correct language in "What's All This About Pronouns?" And I loved leading the Sunday gatherings on the poetry of E.E. Cummings.



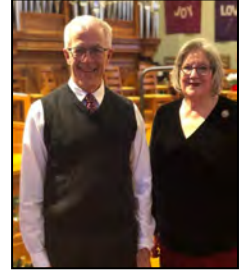
Visiting Elizabeth  
Robertson @  
North Hill



**Marbo Hansen** and new  
friend **Huey** drop by the church  
offices for a visit.



**The Seniors Ministry Team, led by Susan  
Walton & Lucy Sur**, hosted a special  
Christmas service on December 14 featuring  
**John Finney and Laurie Stewart Otten**



At the staff Christmas Party, we laughed  
together and said thank you and farewell to Rev.  
Dr. Jill Edens and Rev. Rick Edens.

**And then on New Year's Day, 2023—Rev. Anne  
Marie Holloway and I welcomed as our new  
colleague, Rev. Jonathan Page!**

Looking back, 2022 was filled with zigs and zags, challenges, and blessings.  
Looking forward, I will keep my eye out for glimpses of grace.  
I am grateful to serve the Hills Church congregation.



*Respectfully submitted,*  
Rev. Judy Swahnberg

# 2022 Annual Report

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway  
Associate Minister of Youth and Families  
2022 Annual (Prayerful) Report

*“Let us then consider how we might spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching...” ~Hebrews 10:24-25*

Wise and Wonderful God, Parent of us all,

I am grateful. Grateful for the ways in which you bring people together, gathered in your name to do the work of Your church. It is both joyful and humbling to be among Your people -- to be called to walk beside them as one of their ministers. The people of the Hills Church work tirelessly to answer Your call to LOVE. It is no small thing to be in the presence of this love – Your Love -- made visible, through 175 years of ministry together... I thank you for the blessings of this holy place...

We began this year O Holy One, facing a surge in Covid, having to pivot, adjust and quickly make decisions that asked us to set our hopes of a “normal” year aside. With your help, we found creative and faithful ways to gather, to keep the most vulnerable among us safe, to praise you and to BE THE CHURCH.

We celebrate that we were not derailed by the resurgence of Covid. The letters of HOPE and the twelve foot cross that the “Men and Women of the Letters” shared with us all provided the encouragement that we so desperately needed to stay the course! New Ministry programs were offered to busy parents, the chapel space was used for safe dinner gatherings, service projects, prayer groups and faithful book studies. The longing to see more of our friends and families of the Hills Church held less “sting” – as more and more people began to return...

Lent led us into a time of remembering how precious life is – and we held in care the journey of Sarah Pedersen. I continue to be stunned by her tireless devotion and leadership, even through cancer. Sarah’s dedication to building our new website is truly a legacy of love. I had the blessing of working closely with Sarah, our Church Moderator, and will forever be in awe of her passion for family, church and community. Sarah’s passing left us all heartbroken. However, her eternal joy and her love for the Hills Church continues to inform our life and ministry together. Lord of Lords, thank you for sharing Sarah with us all...

We entered into the Spring with hope in our hearts as we celebrated a delightful Easter Egg Hunt on the front lawn! Our church coming back to life as people filled the pews for Easter Services!

I praise you O God for the gift of serving alongside my clergy colleagues, and church staff. I lift up to you the ministry of the Rev. Judy Swahnberg, the Rev. Jill and Rick Edens, Sally Tomasetti, Emily Gauthier, John Finney, John Dooley, Jessica Bliss, our new Church Administrator (who is magnificent) Andrea Bellarossa, Stephen Hopkins (who wore two hats for us this year), Kenny Goshgarian, Brain Aucoin, and Joe Brady.

I lift up to the high heavens the countless volunteers that support the family ministries of the Hills Church – including the dedicated work of the Faith Formation Support Board and it’s co chairs, Mary Hill Canavan and David Otten.

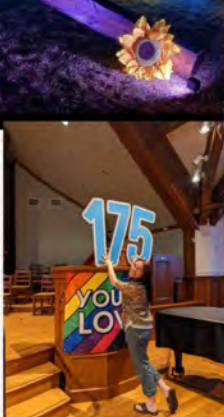
God of new life, you filled our lives with many who continued to be committed to your call to seek justice! The work of the Racial Justice Group and the Welcoming Diversity Equity and Inclusion Ministry Team never missed a beat throughout the year offering book studies, Zoom talks and special gatherings.



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**Rev. Anne Marie Holloway**  
**Associate Minister: Youth and Families**  
Annual Report

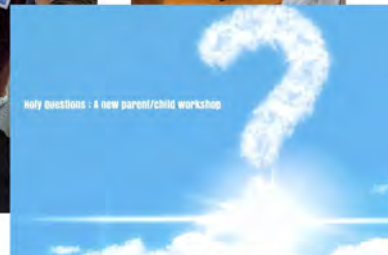
**2022**  
IN REVIEW



*Beyond Grateful!*



# 2022 Annual Report





# 2022 Annual Report

Our community garden was filled with bounty and provided an opportunity for our families to serve together over the summer months. We planted and harvested peppers, tomatoes, herbs, eggplant and more! All our vegetables and herbs were donated to the Wellesley Food Pantry – providing fresh vegetables to those facing food insecurity.

Our faith formative offerings to our youth returned to fully in person gatherings and dinners. I thank you, O generous One for last year's and this year's Confirmation Classes and for the blessing of serving alongside Deacon Mimi D'Angelo. We were able, with the help of Marbo Hansen and her team of Deacons, to provide a Confirmation Dinner to the Confirmands that did not have a chance to enjoy such a gathering – due to covid. We gathered with families and youth in the Assembly Room – over 50 people attended! Our High School Seniors were honored and gifted red scarves. These red scarves hand knitted and blessed by dedicated members of our Church family.

Our Youth began the Fall '22 program season by gathering together to discern your call to serve outside of the church walls. Our youth prayerfully chose to commit to a week long service trip to Costa Rica in April ('23). I pray that you guide and bless the Seventeen Youth and 8 Chaperones from the Hills Church that will be partnering with Led2Serve:Costa Rica this Spring.

In the name of love, two magnificent leaders stepped forward to run the Pumpkin Patch this year. KC Kranker and Julie Safaii joined David Otten, Andy Wilson and myself in an effort to bring 1500 pounds of pumpkins to our front lawn. This beloved annual fundraiser takes over 150 volunteers, and a dedicated Ministry Team. With new Patch T-shirts and lots of enthusiasm, our Patch Fundraiser supported the Indigenous Farming Community in NM that grows our pumpkins, provided a generous donation to Global H.O.P.E (disaster relief), and additional funding for our youth service trip to Costa Rica!

With the calling of Rev. Jonathan Page, and a new journey ahead of us, I humbly thank you...

Over and over again, you have shown up, O God. Over and over again, you have called us to love. Over and over again you support us as we do our best to answer your call. For this, for your persistent pursuit of our hearts – I give you thanks and praise. Now and forever more...

Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway

# 2022 Annual Report

## THE RE-OPENING TASK FORCE



The winter of 2021-22 brought us a new wave of COVID-19 cases, and new variants, most notably Omicron which peaked in January. Since then, the appearance of other sub-variants of Omicron have produced mini-waves, and another wave appears to be on the way. Meanwhile, 2022 saw the progressive approval of vaccines for children down to the age of 6 months, and the arrival of new boosters. The high vaccination rates in MA and the fact that the Omicron variant infected so many people, especially those who had not been vaccinated, are thought to explain the relatively low hospitalization and mortality rates seen with these subsequent waves of infection.

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

For most of 2022 we have been able to gather for worship and fellowship with minimal restrictions; however, we recognize that the risks of infection are quite different for different people and have sought to create an environment which is as welcoming and safe for as many people as possible. The following guidelines are in place:

- Vaccination is encouraged, but not required. Our staff, including for the Church School, are all vaccinated
- Masking and social distancing are encouraged, but not required.
- All worship services and most meetings can be attended virtually and in real time.
- When possible, we have held social events, like the Fellowship Hour after services, outdoors.
- The HVAC system for the Sanctuary is equipped with technology to reduce the levels of air-borne pathogens

The Task Force has also issued notifications when members (and guests) who have attended a service or activity at the church have reported testing positive for COVID-19 in the days following the event. These notifications are issued in the interest of transparency and with the intention of making it possible for people to make decisions about the appropriate response based on their individual circumstances.

In 2023, the Task Force will continue to monitor the public health data, review the recommendations issued by the Commonwealth and the CDC, and revise our practices as needed. The Task Force is very aware of how much gathering in-person nourishes the spirit, and is trying to balance that against our responsibility to minimize the transmission of Covid in our community. However, we have to be prepared to be flexible. One thing we have learned about COVID-19 is that it is unpredictable and may have more surprises in store for us!

Respectfully submitted,

*The Re-Opening Task Force*

*Rob Andrews, Mimi D'Angelo, Jill Edens, Richard Edens, John Finney, Anne Marie Holloway, Chris Stowell, Judy Swahnberg, Sally Tomasetti, Elaine Vildzius*

# 2022 Annual Report

## STRENGTHENING CHURCH GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE

The Strengthening Church Governance Implementation Task Force (SCG-ITF) was formed by the Church Council in April 2021 as a successor to the earlier Strengthening Church Governance task force that provided recommendations around three major governance issues identified by the Council at the end of 2019:

- 1) **Lack of awareness and understanding of Hills Church governance** structure and processes among members of the congregation;
- 2) **Need for improvement in recruitment and succession planning** of the church's congregational volunteer bodies; and
- 3) **Need for better communication** both among these bodies and to the congregation about church governance structure, processes, and volunteer opportunities.

The purpose of the successor SCG-ITF was to implement certain of the key recommendations. The initial deliverable, approved by Church Council in November 2021, was the Governance Guidelines, a new reference tool and handbook for congregational church leaders on governance issues. A PDF of this document is posted on the church website, along with a checklist and guidelines on "How to Start a Ministry Team," both accessible via the [Members page](#).

Continuing their work in 2022, the SCG-ITF delivered the following:

### **Bylaws Changes**

The SCG-ITF prepared language for several changes to the church Bylaws which were reviewed and approved by Church Council and later approved by the congregation at the Annual Meeting on January 30, 2022.

### **Bi-fold Flier and Companion Floor Banner: How Our Church Is Organized**

The task force turned their attention to developing several communications pieces for outreach to the congregation. The initial pieces were a bi-fold flier titled "How Our Church Is Organized" along with a companion pop-up floor banner, shown here.



### **Time, Talents & Opportunities**



The most significant new communications piece developed by the task force was a major update and expansion of the 2017 *Time & Talents* booklet, now retitled *Time, Talents & Opportunities* (TT&O). In addition to carrying the newly redesigned church governance chart the book carries detailed profiles of all the governing bodies and ministry teams in the church. It also includes an entirely new section detailing all the clergy and staff-led opportunities in the church, from music offerings such as the Chancel Choir and Hills Bells, to youth opportunities, and more.

Three hundred copies of the printed, spiral bound books were delivered in time for Rally Day on 9/18/22 and the Ministry Fair produced by Participation & Involvement (P&I) as the kick-off event of the fall invitation season for church volunteer roles. Marketing for the new books continued throughout the fall in the *Events @ the Hills* weekly e-mail newsletter.

### **Church Website Content**

Members of the task force also worked with the church web team to adapt the TT&O book and related content for the website, including posting a PDF version of the full TT&O book, accessible on [Serving Others page](#). The task force envisions the content being adapted and updated on the website to reflect future governance changes and maintain current information between printed versions of the book.

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# 2022 Annual Report

## **Statement of Needs for New Church Database**

Working in coordination with members of P&I and the Membership Ministry Team, the task force also developed a statement of needs for a new church database as they pertain to governance issues, including capturing individual church members' interests, skills, past volunteer roles, and other items that P&I and other church bodies feel would be useful database content for their purposes.

## **Final Report and Dissolution**

Having met their major goals over the course of 2021-2022, the SCG-ITF requested formal dissolution by Church Council at the December 13, 2022 Council meeting. Noting that governance work will always be ongoing in the church, the Report provides several recommendations, both for Church Council as well as for the P&I Special Ministry Team, for going forward.

## **With Appreciation**

The task force Co-Chairs wish to provide a heartfelt thanks to each of the members of the task force for their dedication to the work of strengthening church governance at the Hills Church:

Sarah Pedersen, Moderator  
Rich Sweeting, Clerk  
Becky Williams, former Leader, Participation & Involvement  
Rev. Rick Edens, Interim Co-Senior Pastor - Clergy Liaison

Our work spanned more than a year and half, much of which was conducted during the COVID--19 pandemic. Task force members made an enormous commitment of time and energy, volunteering many long hours spent in deliberation and discernment via Zoom, as well as in document drafting, review, and approval. We offer thanks to Rev. Rick Edens for his consistent participation and wise counsel throughout our time together. We also thank Andrea Bellarosa for her marketing efforts on our behalf. We also offer special thanks to Noreen Young, designer extraordinaire, for her invaluable contributions to the work of the task force and the life of the church; we could not have accomplished what we did without her talents and commitment to our cause.

Finally, we wish to recognize the late Sarah Pedersen for her role in our efforts. As Moderator Sarah initiated the implementation task force, then both championed our efforts and served wholeheartedly on our team, always believing in the importance of strengthening governance at the Hills Church. What we collectively achieved is part of her legacy.

Prayerfully submitted,

*Doug Eisenhart, Church Council - Co-Chair  
Laurie Stewart Otten, Rising Moderator - Co-Chair*



# 2022 Annual Report

## CHURCH COUNCIL

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

This year Council met ten times, all via Zoom. We continued the practice of writing and distributing “Mini-Minutes” to the congregation after most meetings, although as the year developed this became challenging.

Our Former Moderator, Sarah Pedersen, passed away in August. She loved the Hills Church and was a stalwart leader through the pandemic and ministerial transition, despite her declining health. We miss her deeply.

### **Calling of New Senior Minister**

Under our Bylaws, the Spiritual Care Support Board / Deacons is responsible for “filling the pulpit” During 2021 they formed an Interim Selection Committee which, with the assistance of the Southern New England Conference of the UCC, successfully recruited Rev. Dr. Jill Edens and Rev. Rick Edens as Co-Interim Ministers. The Deacons then formed a Transition Committee which created a Hills Church profile for use in the search process for our new settled Senior Minister. This profile was finalized in February Of 2022. The Deacons, with input from the clergy and Moderators, recruited Co-Chairs and formed a Search Committee which conducted a nation-wide search for the new minister relying on the systems, resources, and assistance of the UCC.

In early August the Search Committee reported to the Deacons and the Moderators that they had unanimously recommended Reverend Jonathan Page as the candidate. Church Council voted in our August meeting to call a Special Meeting of the congregation on Sunday September 11. During that weekend, Rev. Page met with Church Council, the Deacons, staff, and others.

On September 11, the congregation of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church, meeting in the Sanctuary and virtually, voted resoundingly to share in a mutual and common ministry in Christ with Reverend Jonathan Page and to call him to become the fifteenth settled Senior Minister in the 175-year history of the Wellesley Hills Church. He will begin his ministry in the Hills on January 1, 2023.

Earlier in worship, Jon preached passionately on “Seeking the Lost” on the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin and challenged us to be a church that transforms lives and our communities for the better. As he said in the conclusion of a pamphlet introducing him to the congregation before the Meeting:

*“Throughout these past fifteen years [since his ordination], God has shown up again and again affirming my call and deepening my faith. It is precisely these experiences that have convinced me of the power and relevance of church in the 21st century. Churches change people’s lives. They help us ask big questions. They give us direction and purpose. They provide community and support through life’s peaks and valleys. The key to church vitality and growth is the degree to which churches foster spiritual transformation.”*

Jonathan grew up in Wellesley and in the Hills Church, where he was baptized, confirmed, and began his faith journey. He was ordained in our Sanctuary in 2007. We welcome him back with joy and enthusiasm.

The Council is deeply appreciative of the hard work, tireless dedication and discernment of the Deacons, the Transition Committee, the Search Committee, our Interim Ministers and Associate ministers and all the other

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volunteers and staff in these processes.

The Hills Church was blessed over sixteen months by the loving care and leadership of the Rev. Dr. Jill Edens and the Rev. Richard Edens as our Interim Ministers. They guided us through the troubled waters of the pandemic and the turbulence of transition. We wish them Godspeed in their continuing service to the broader church with hearts full of gratitude.

## 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

This year the Hills Church celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding in 1847. A number of events were organized by the Spiritual Care Support Board / Deacons and others to celebrate the anniversary. On Sunday May 1 after worship Susan Walton lead an Historical Tour of the Hills Church. On May 11 Professor Laurie Maffly-Kipp, a church historian, hosted a Zoom meeting during which she gave an overview of Congregationalism in the 1840's when Hills Church was founded, and especially its active engagement with abolition and temperance. On Sunday May 15 after worship, Margaret Bendroth, former Executive Director of the Congregational Library and a longtime friend of the Hills Church, spoke specifically about the founding of Hills Church.



On June 11th the Deacons sponsored a party with food and live jazz music provided by the group that plays for Old South's Thursday Jazz service. On Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup> there was a special celebration during worship followed by the annual church picnic sponsored by Parish Life.

## Capital Campaign and Repayment of Debt

Over 95% of million pledged to the Generation to Generation Campaign, have been received as of December 31, 2022. The bank loan taken out to speed the facility renovation has been PAID OFF and we are on our way to returning the money drawn down from the endowment.

We thank the congregation for their generous commitment to the future of the Hills Church and the leaders of the facility project, the Capital Campaign and the Stewards and Council members of the time for their foresight and courage.

## 2022 Annual Meeting

Once again, the Zoom format – and all the hard work of clergy, staff, and volunteers – led to a very successful Annual meeting. Attendance and participation were strong. In addition to receiving reports, voting in the slate of Officers and Special Ministry Team members, and adopting the 2023 budget, a number of bylaw amendments were adopted to clarify and streamline governance.

Learnings for future years include emphasizing the Annual Report in premeeting email and other communications, having hard copies available in worship the week before the meeting. We will also strive to have detailed presentations on the various topics in the premeeting question and answer session the week before Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting will then include summary presentations, motions, and voting.

## Financial Situation 2022 and Looking Forward

While 2022 was a very challenging year for investment performance, strong stewardship collections, and Nursery School enrollment and tuition, along with continued grants from the Commonwealth to support preschool, all contributed to strong revenue growth in 2022. Expenses were well controlled and for the second year in a row and the fourth year in the last ten, no draw was required from the endowment.

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# 2022 Annual Report

As detailed in the Stewards Report, 2023 looks to be a challenging year both for stewardship and spending. Council and the Stewards will continue to carefully manage expenses, but the great majority of our expenses are for human resources – our clergy and staff – and the maintenance, upkeep and insuring of our facility. We believe that the Christian Service-related spending is a core part of our mission. We also have faith that the congregation will rise to the stewardship challenge and some hope that the state grants to nursery schools will continue. We will need to draw from the endowment but expect that the average draw over 2021 through 2023 will still be below the 4% target.

Our focus remains supporting the work of our excellent clergy and staff, strengthening programs that nurture our faith, growing our membership and nurturing a new generation of givers, including leadership givers.

In last year's Annual Report we mentioned potential Parish House renovations. A working group has developed plans for limited renovations, particularly the rest rooms, which will benefit all, bring us in compliance with inclusive access requirements, enhance our already wonderful Church School experience, and allow expansion of Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills. There are many non-financial benefits, but the financial payback appears compelling.

Pursuant to the Process for Project Approval policy adopted by Church Council, a Review Panel including Stewards, Moderators, the Senior Minister and other church leaders expects to finalize plans and analyses over the next several weeks and engage with members through email, tours, meetings and discussions in February. With positive input from the congregation, Church Council will be asked to call a Special Meeting of the congregation in March to approve the required facility modifications to be carried out over the summer. With approval, we hope to have the renovated restrooms and other improvements in place by September and begin enrolling two-year-olds in the Nursery School in January 2024.

## **Strengthening Church Governance Implementation Task Force**

2022 saw the completion of the work of the Strengthening Church Governance Task Force and its successor Strengthening Church Governance Implementation Task Force. Initially commissioned in 2020 these task forces have developed, implemented and supported a number of key initiatives to improve our church governance, including bylaw amendments, creation of a Membership Ministry Team and improved communications channels.

In 2022 the SCG/ITF developed and published a major update and expansion of the 2017 *Time & Talents* booklet, now retitled *Time, Talents & Opportunities* (TT&O). In addition to carrying the newly redesigned church governance chart the book carries detailed profiles of all the governing bodies and ministry teams in the church. It also includes an entirely new section detailing all the clergy and staff-led opportunities in the church, from music offerings such as the Chancel Choir, to youth opportunities, and more.

See the SCG/ITF Report on page 15 for more information.

Council thanks the Co-Chairs Doug Eisenhart and Laurie Otten, as well as the members of both Task Forces for their long and invaluable work.

## **Betsy Wooster's Ordination**

On September 18, Betsy Wooster was ordained into ministry in Ohio. Rev. Judy Swahnberg preached and Mary Hill Canavan acted as a representative of the Hills Church, along with Judy, at the ordination. Betsy joins Rev. Judy Swahnberg, and Rev. Jonathan Page in a long line of women and men nurtured at and by the

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# 2022 Annual Report

Hills Church, as they discerned their call to ministry.

## **Rich Sweeting to Become Clerk Emeritus**

Rich Sweeting has been Clerk of the First Congregation Church in Wellesley Hills for decades. His knowledge of our history, polity, and practice is irreplaceable. Rich will be moving to a new position of Clerk Emeritus, where he will be a source of counsel and knowledge to our regularly elected Clerk and Assistant Clerk, and available to perform their duties under the bylaws in their absence. He will be a voting member of Church Council.

Bylaw amendments to accomplish this will be included on the Warrant for the January 29 Annual Meeting and he will be included as Clerk Emeritus in the nominating slate.

We thank Rich for his continuing commitment to Hills Church Governance.

## **John Finney to Retire as Music Director in August 2023**

Early in the year the Moderators and Council learned that our beloved Music Director John Finney would retire to Florida at the end of summer 2023. John has been our Music Director since 1984, a bulwark of faith, inspiration and leadership during times of joy, sorrow, and other trials. He will be deeply missed.

The Deacons formed a Music Discernment Committee to through surveys, discussion groups and meetings. The Committee presented its report to the congregation, Deacons, and Council in November and December (See Music Discernment Committee Report,)

The 2022 and 2023 Senior Deacons, Moderators, and our new Senior Minister have begun consultation on the search process for staffing the needs identified in the Report, for overall direction of Music at the Hills Church, the organs, the Youth and Children's programs, and directing the Bell Choir. There is an expectation that these will require multiple talented and inspiring leaders on a parttime basis.

## **Thanks**

It has been a privilege and pleasure to work with all the dedicated and talented members of Church Council this year. Our congregation is blessed with a deep bench; the talents, dedication, and heart of our members are rich resources! I would like to thank Laurie Otten (Rising Moderator), the clergy, Senior Deacons, Support Board Chairs, and other volunteers. Special thanks to our dedicated, hardworking staff, particularly Andrea Bellarosa, Church Administrator, and Melanie Dawson, Director of the Wellesley Nursery in the Hills.

Words fail to express my gratitude to Sarah Pedersen and all she did to support the Hills Church and guide us and particularly me through the past two years.

I look forward to serving as Former Moderator through 2023 and continuing to support Laurie Otten, who will become Moderator after the January 29, 2023 Annual Meeting and Steven Patrick who will become Rising Moderator.

*In service and in faith,  
Jack Morgan, Moderator*



# 2022 Annual Report

## CHURCH CLERK

This report reflects a change from our historical methodology of keeping the tally.

In fall of 2021, as part of the work being completed in preparation to search for a new Senior Minister, the Deacons, after review of the membership list of the congregation, and in accordance with the Bylaws of the Church, have determined the membership number to be as follows:

Report of membership as of

The Deacons are expected to do more work on this subject in the coming year.

Report of membership as of December 31, 2021 .....610

Received: All Sources .....6

Losses: Deaths.....5

Removed/Transferred .....0

Final membership as of December 31, 2022 .....611

*Respectfully submitted,  
Richard J. Sweeting, Clerk*

# 2022 Annual Report

## SEARCH & TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY COMMITTEES

Your Church leadership, The Board of Deacons, Church Council, Settled & Interim Clergy had much work to do during our interim time and period of transition. Interim times are no doubt challenging, but also filled with aspirational ideas and rich opportunities and hopeful thoughts of a bright future for our Church's next 175 years. Your leadership is grateful for the blessings we have starting with our members, our staff and the many volunteers that make our sacred space and our place on God's earth so cherished.

In the fall of 2021, the Spiritual Care Support Board (Board of Deacons) appointed a Transition Committee to survey the congregation about our desires for our time and for the future. The Transition Committee developed a Church Profile to tell the world who we are and what we are, and where we are going as a community church. As the Transition Committee completed its work during the winter, the Board of Deacons formed a Search Committee who would then use the Profile as a means to share with candidates for our Settled Senior Minister position. The Profile was published in a United Church of Christ opportunities portal by our Southern New England Conference (SNEUCC) Area Conference Minister (ACM) Reverend Alex Shea Will. Rev. Shea Will also held several training sessions and arranged for a mock interview for the Search Committee before they began their work.

The Search Committee met several times to pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit for help in discerning the will of God for her Church here in our town. We committed to view the process and the candidates from our perspective and from the candidates'. We developed a set of questions that were asked of every candidate we interviewed in several key areas; spirituality, preaching, relationship boundaries, administration, church membership, and finally, why are you looking for change now, and why are you interested in leading us? The Search Committee reviewed fifteen ministerial profiles submitted to us through the SNEUCC and we selected eight candidates for a first interview, all on-line. The committee believed that we had an outstanding group of candidates to consider. We agreed to move forward with second interviews in person with our top candidates. After careful and thoughtful discussions, we reflected on the wants and desires of our Congregation as expressed in the Church Profile and selected a single candidate for a third interview. The interview was held in our Reception Room in early August. We asked the candidate to lead us in prayer and in a devotional, like a theological reflection, on a Bible passage. He chose Paul's letter to the Hebrews 11, The Meaning of Faith. We also reflected on the life and the gifts of our former Moderator and prayed for her family. We invited our senior leadership to meet individually with our final candidate during that day, including the Clergy, the Co-Senior Deacons, the Moderators, our Director of Music, and the Chair of our Personnel Committee. At the end of that day, the Search Committee met to reflect on the day, and to pray. The Committee decided to select our final candidate as the person to recommend as our next Settled Senior Minister.



We were very pleased to recommend the Reverend Jonathan C. Page. Jon was raised in the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church and was ordained here in December 2007. Educated at Harvard College and Yale Divinity School, Jon formerly served as the undergraduate chaplain at Harvard University's Memorial Church under Rev. Peter Gomes and later as the Senior Minister of United Church of Christ-Congregational in Ames, Iowa. Jon also previously taught at Eton College in England, Groton School in Massachusetts, and was a Teaching Fellow at Yale University.

Rev. Jonathan C. Page most recently served as the Senior Minister of First Congregational Church of Houston, Texas, a role he held since 2015. While in Houston, Jon has helped grow the congregation by 30% and the budget there by 50%.

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Page is the author of *Ringling the Gotchnag: Two American Missionary Families in Turkey, 1855-1922* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2009). While in Iowa, he wrote monthly columns for the *Ames Tribune* and *ACCESSLine*. Jon is currently finishing a theologically themed novel set in Nigeria.

Jon has a deep and abiding passion for social justice. While working at Harvard, he organized and led the “Right to Serve Tour,” a four state bus tour with acts of civil disobedience to protest Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. Also at Harvard he helped organize a major conference on climate change for 350.org. While in Iowa Jon sat on the board of the Interfaith Alliance, an advocacy group focused on the separation of church and state, and was heavily involved with AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy), the IAF affiliate in Iowa. While in Houston, Jon co-founded and was the first president of the Faith Leaders Coalition of Greater Houston, an organization of progressive faith leaders involved in political advocacy for the benefit of those in need. In Houston he worked on a variety of social justice issues, including LGBT rights, immigration reform, criminal justice reform, and educational policy. He has also been a leader in The Metropolitan Organization (TMO), the IAH affiliate in Houston, and has served on the Professional Advisory Group for the CPE program at Baylor-St. Luke’s Hospital.

Jon is passionate about the role of progressive churches in 21st century American society and the power of churches to transform lives and our communities for the better. He is a former board member of the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus, the LGBT group for Harvard alumni.

Jon wrote in his ministerial profile: “In November 2003 I had a profound epiphany when I felt God was calling me to the ministry. It was a moment of clarity in which the various strands of my life came together and pointed me in a new direction. That life-changing call experience didn’t appear out of nowhere. It had been nurtured in the music, the liturgy, and Sunday School at the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church. The Hills Church, as it’s called, taught me about Jesus and his message. More than anything else, I remember those glorious Easter mornings as a child when I felt, for the first time, what resurrection meant. This seed of my vocation was nourished through reading the Bible, at the Roxbury Latin School in Boston, and later in the pews of Memorial Church at Harvard. Religion had long been central to my life, and from that moment in 2003 I knew my future path lay in the church. What’s inspiring to me is how my call has been re-affirmed over the past fifteen years of ordained ministry. I remember vividly when I have sat by someone’s bedside as they died. There I was praying with the family and sharing that most sacred moment when God was present for all to see. I have loved teaching confirmation classes and leading small groups, going on mission trips and raising our candles aloft as we sing “Silent Night” on Christmas Eve. My vocation has been further cultivated by the countless weddings and baptisms, filled with joy, and the tough moments when someone has shared they are going through a divorce. Throughout these past fifteen years, God has shown up again and again affirming my call and deepening my faith. It is precisely these experiences that have convinced me of the power and relevance of church in the 21st century. Churches change people’s lives. They help us ask big questions. They give us direction and purpose. They provide community and support through life’s peaks and valleys. The key to church vitality and growth is the degree to which churches foster spiritual transformation.”

We look forward to many years with Jonathan as our Settled Senior Minister.

Members of the Search Committee:

*Gary McCabe, Becky Lockwood, Steven Patrick, Cindy Lowe, Janice Cleveland Washburn, Neely Dodge, Jim McKinney*

Members of the Transition Committee

*Debbie Karlson, Susie Alexander, Dana Brennan, Jennifer Cassettari, Mimi D’Angelo, P-O Davidson, Dwight Garland, Jason Kranker, Chris Stowell*

# 2022 Annual Report

## PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

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

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

This year the Personnel Committee assisted with the hiring a permanent church administrator, a part time bookkeeper, and a part time facility manager. The committee also researched and worked on implementing the new UCC salary guidelines for ministers which became effective this year; this work supported our new senior minister call and related 2023 budget planning. The committee supported a multi-year contract with the head of the nursery school, supported the call agreement of the new senior minister, and the search committee for the new music director.

Members of the Personnel Committee in 2022 were: Ruth Persson, Chair; members at large: Gintas Vildzius, Linda Thomas; from the moderators: Sarah Pedersen and Laurie Otten; from the senior deacon: Steve Groff; from Stewards: Alex Kolb; and the Senior Ministers: Jill and Rick Eden.

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

Respectfully submitted,

*Ruth Persson*  
*Chair*



# 2022 Annual Report

## CHRISTIAN SERVICE SUPPORT BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

### **The mission and contributions of the Christian Service Support Board (CSSB):**

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

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

This year the CSSB embarked on an initiative to discern where it made sense to target our grantmaking and service activities. Through a series of discussions during our meetings, we arrived at a plan to target a majority of our grantmaking funds to a few focus areas, and to reserve a smaller portion of our grantmaking funds for other organizations that do good work in our community. We determined that the two focus areas for the majority of our grantmaking funds would be:

Reducing economic and social inequality in our metropolitan Boston community; and  
Serving the needs of Refugees, Immigrants, and other needy groups in the Global community of which we are a part.

In addition to these two focus areas, we agreed to play a role in encouraging the WHCC congregation to consider and adopt the drive to become a "Green Congregation," bringing environmental justice within the remit of the CSSB. Toward the end of the year, we also considered whether it would be appropriate to broaden the remit of the CSSB to include broader efforts to strive toward equity and diversity under a broader heading of "justice, service and outreach"; this discussion has begun but will surely need more discernment, more input from the existing justice-oriented ministries within the congregation, as well as the guidance and input of our new Senior Minister.

For 2022 we dedicated special collections as follows:

The Easter special collection raised well over \$25,000 for relief for the people of war-torn Ukraine through the UCC's global "Project H.O.P.E."

The Pumpkin Patch funds were used to support youth service trips as well as hurricane disaster relief through the UCC's Project H.O.P.E.

The Christmas special collection will be dedicated to the UCC Project H.O.P.E. to support relief efforts for victims of the floods in Pakistan as well as continuing support of the people in Ukraine.

Through our annual grantmaking program, we requested proposals from about 15 organizations that are active in the focus areas mentioned above. The WHCC Church budget sets aside a generous pot of funds that we were able to award as grants to support the ongoing ministry and service work of 14 organizations in our local and global community, including: A Path in the Woods, African Indian Alliance, City Mission Society, Common Cathedral, Cooperative Metro Ministries, Family Promise, Friends of Boston Homeless, Habitat for Humanity, Honduras Hope, New Beginnings, New Life Furniture Bank, Wellesley A Better Chance, and the Wellesley Food Pantry. This list of supported organizations changes from year to year, and the CSSB would like to hear from members of the congregation if it fits with our values and goals and/or if there are other

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organizations that should also be considered. Going forward, we would like to continue to explore opportunities to link service contributions by members of our congregation to our grants to support the mission of these organizations that do God's work here on earth.

Between our special collections and our dedicated grantmaking funds, the Hills Church has already provided well over \$100,000 to organizations that extend our mission of caring for our neighbors here on earth. The CSSB members are humbled by our role in being the WHCC's stewards in directing these funds to support good works.

Finally, as in past years, members of our Congregation led a number of service initiatives and the CSSB aimed to nourish and support these, including: the Wellesley Food Pantry, coat collections, Christmas gift collections for families in Waltham, the "Feed the Hungry Ministry" for members of the "Common Cathedral" congregation, and other programs supported by our Youth ministries.

Elaine Vildzius will be taking over as Chair of the CSSB going into 2023. We look forward to the Congregation's input and suggestions as we continue our efforts to create synergies between our service missions and our outreach and grantmaking support of mission-driven organizations.

*Faithfully,*

Mark Fraga (Chair), Tina Anderson, Charlie Liebenberg (youth member), Lucy O'Mara, Nana Poku, Julie Karlson Safaii, Martha Stowell, and Bob Tomasetti. Tina Anderson has acted as minute-keeper, and Doug Eisenhart has served as our liaison to Church Council. Rev Rick Edens has joined the meetings of the CSSB and we are grateful for his leadership, ideas and support.

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## AFRICAN ALLIANCE



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

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

This year two board members, Katie and Fiona were able to travel to Karnataka to meet with our partners, continue strengthening our relationships, and check in on the physical needs of the children and villages. Fiona traveled in January and was able to meet with our long time partner in goodwill Ramnath Siddi, and receive updates on his efforts as the AIA School Facilitator and Liaison. Ramnath fulfilled this role until May 2022. AIA hopes to find our next partner that will fulfill this crucial on the ground role. Katie traveled in November and focused on after school play activities and games and the needs of tuition centers we support.

This year we were able to hire more tuition (after school learning/tutoring) teachers to help further the education of Siddi and non-Siddi students. Currently we support six tuition centers in four different villages, with hopes of adding more in 2023. There are four different languages spoken throughout these centers, helping students in both national and local language as well as English. Students are in grades 1 through 10 and attend tuition in the evenings of every school day. These tuition centers give students space, time, and trained teacher support to focus on their learning that they may not receive in their homes.

Our goals in 2023 include advancing these tuition centers with building maintenance, educational resources, and games to support children's growth in social, emotional, and physical development as well. We hope to reach another remote village and support them with a new tuition center, and a "play home" for children ages 2-5 during the day. We also hope to grow and advance our board, complete a new website, and educate our community here in the U.S on ways to support our partners in the Siddi community.

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

Submitted by Katie McCabe  
African Indian Alliance: A Siddi Partnership, Inc.

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## CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

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

The youth group helped unload presents from the cars, wrapped some last-minute presents, and filled gift bags with a treat and a note for each family (thank you Anne Marie Holloway!). Both the youth group and the Sunday School children (thank you Sally Tomasetti!) made Christmas cards for every family.

This year 270 people were on our list (74 families) and every one of them received presents. 74 people shopped. Supply chain delays did not prevent them from getting the job done! Many others participated by donating money (\$3915) that will be used throughout the year to respond to urgent needs (primarily food and diapers).



This ministry is so much more than just buying Christmas presents for families. Church members tell me that it's their

favorite thing to do. They report that it is a joy to shop for these families who have so little, and they feel blessed doing it. They sign-up for families with children the same age as theirs, and then shop with their children, teaching them the joy of giving. Parents share with me that their children have used their allowance money to shop for toys for the children on the list. Grandparents shop with grandchildren. Siblings sign-up to shop together. People who are unable to shop donate money. It's all truly amazing!

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

A huge thank to everyone who participated in this ministry!

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Sue Spencer*  
*Christmas Gift Ministry*

# 2022 Annual Report

## HONDURAS HOPE



Honduras Hope (HH) would like to thank the WHCC for your many years of faithful support, which helps make it possible for us to continue our transformative work with the people of Plan Grande and San José.

Honduras Hope is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that for more than 20 years has been working through long-term partnerships with two poor and marginalized communities: Plan Grande, a reservation for the Indigenous Tolupan people, and San José, a mountain community of squatters. We focus on programs that provide a path out of poverty and toward a full and prosperous life right in Honduras.

In 2022, after two years with no trips to Honduras due to COVID and managing our programs from afar with the help of our In-country Coordinator, trips resumed and friends and Board Members of Honduras Hope traveled to Honduras in both March and November. It was good to be back!

Your financial support helps sustain programs in the following areas:

**Food & Nutrition:** HH provides hot meals three times a week to preschoolers in Plan Grande and San José.

**Education:** HH pays tuition and fees and purchases uniforms and school supplies for students to attend secondary school in Yoro. We maintain a boarding house in Yoro staffed by a house mother, so that students from San José can attend school in Yoro. Tutors were hired to help the students with their studies. We also support 15 university students. This year we celebrated the HS graduations of four students from Plan Grande and one student from San José.

**Healthcare:** The health clinic in San José is staffed by a full-time nurse and provides medical care and public health services for the people of San José and 7 surrounding communities.

**Housing/Infrastructure:** HH works with the communities to upgrade houses that have fallen into disrepair. On the November trip, a concrete floor was poured in a home (dirt floors do not protect from intestinal parasites) and the Plan Grande Community Center was painted.

**Empowerment:** The Girls Empowerment Program focuses on building self-esteem, lifting the dignity and value of each girl, and encouraging them to stay in school. All the Plan Grande HS graduates were participants in the Girls Empowerment program. The Plan Grande Women's Cooperative makes and sells pine needle baskets that provides much needed income for their families as well as empowering them as they build their micro-business. In December we sold their baskets during community hour and sold out in 10 minutes!

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Good nutrition & healthcare support brain development, education opens doors and provides a pathway out of poverty. These are what your support provides to the people of Plan Grande and San José. But more than this, you bring hope for a better future to a vulnerable and marginalized people. Praise God!

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sue Spencer*

*Honduras Hope Liaison for the CSSB*

*Honduras Hope Board Member*



# 2022 Annual Report

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY 2022



Wellesley Hills Congregational Church (WHCC) continues to partner with the MetroWest/Greater Worcester (MGW) chapter of Habitat for Humanity International. MGW's mission is to build homes, communities and hope in 42 cities and towns in Middlesex and Worcester counties that it serves. It helps low-to-moderate income families, veterans, and seniors with safe and affordable housing.

Habitat for Humanity International is a global non-governmental organization whose mission is to provide decent living spaces for low-to-moderate income people. Habitat for Humanity achieves this humanitarian mission through direct funding from donors and a network of volunteers to build homes. In 2022 WHCC (Christian Service Support Board) awarded a grant of \$11,000 to MetroWest/Greater Worcester Habitat chapter.

Due a variety scheduling challenges at MGW, WHCC did not participate in any project in 2022. However, Habitat remains a popular outreach service project at WHCC. We plan to participate in multiple projects in 2023. Our next service is scheduled for January 14, 2023, during MLK Weekend.

WHCC's Habitat team has been reorganized. After 9 years of leadership, Elaine Vildzius stepped down as chair of WHCC's Habitat team in March 2022. She was replaced by co-chairs Nana Poku and Rob Andrews.

Respectfully submitted,

*Nana Poku*  
*Co-chair*

# 2022 Annual Report

## FAMILY PROMISE METROWEST (FPM)



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

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

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

FPM consists of 19 host congregations and 32 support congregations. WHCC is one of the host congregations. In past years, we provided meals and lodging for guests during their one-week stays with us, usually three - four times a year. WHCC families slept in converted Sunday school classrooms. A FPM donated van provided transportation to the Church each evening from the FPM Day Center and back again each morning.

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

In 2022 hosting looks a little different! Host and Support congregations now provide support with three primary roles at the shelter in Natick: Grocery Shoppers, Dinner Chefs and Dinner Hosts, described below. More volunteer roles are expected to be added as this new way of hosting evolves and it becomes clear what else might be needed.

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

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

**Grocery Shoppers:** Volunteers shop for and donate supplies that we distribute to families across all our

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# 2022 Annual Report

programs, including breakfast/lunch items for shelter families and non-perishable pantry items for families in LIFE/SAIL programs. Grocery donations for shelter families will focus on supplying items that the families in all of the Programs need.

Volunteers from the congregations work together to meet this commitment, enabling each to contribute according to their abilities and capacity, while also developing valuable relationships that will strengthen our community. WHCC weeks to host in 2023 include: Week of Feb 5 and November 19.

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

The SAIL program is a transitional living program to assist families after moving out of shelter. Case Management and subsidies are provided for one year following the move to ensure sustainability.

The “Steps to Success” program focuses on comprehensive employment support and education. This program provides the means for families to maximize their earning potential while in shelter and transitional living.

The LIFE program is a homelessness prevention program that supports families who are at risk of eviction but not yet homeless. Families may get one time help with a months rent, which is sometimes all they need to avoid homelessness.

2022 Highlights: Provided volunteers and support for three host weeks in the last two quarters of the year!

## **2022 Goals include:**

- Recruit another coordinator for WHCC

- Educate our congregation on the expanded FPM offerings and volunteer opportunities

- Recruit new volunteers from WHCC and Temple Beth Elohim

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

Respectfully submitted,

*Tricia Frank and Neely Dodge, Chairs*

*Note: Johanna Winkelman continues to help, wherever needed.*

# 2022 Annual Report

## THE SPIRITUAL CARE SUPPORT BOARD (BOARD OF DEACONS)

We began 2022 with a great deal of optimism about our ability to regather in person in the sanctuary on Sundays and elsewhere in the church on other occasions for meetings, meditations, fellowship events, and many other activities. As so many observed in the early spring, we were done with Covid but Covid wasn't done with us. In-person worship resumed in January 2022, however attendance was not close to what we experienced in years past on comparable Sundays. Virtual worship was robust throughout the year. Communion was celebrated on the first Sunday of the month and on Easter Sunday in the sanctuary, as is our custom. Nonetheless, several of these celebrations have been via intinction at the front of the sanctuary rather than via passed communion plates and cups.

It was also a year in which we hoped to rebuild attendance and participation after the departure of our much-beloved senior minister in 2021. Rebuilding is a significant challenge, and one that we intend to continue to pursue in 2023.

The congregation was blessed immeasurably by the service of the Revs. Jill and Rick Edens who led us as interim co-pastors throughout 2023. We were busy and active despite the obvious challenges: Jill and Rick, with the enthusiastic support of our Associate Ministers, Revs. Judy Swahnberg and Anne Marie Holloway. We celebrated throughout the year the 175th Anniversary of the founding of the First Congregational Church in Wellesley Hills ("Hills Church") and in the search and call for a new Settled Minister. Many of the church's larger group activities were held outdoors, with the aim of increasing attendance by providing fellowship opportunities in fresh air, as recommended by public health representatives.

### **Celebrating 175 Years**

The church kicked off its celebration with the observation in February of the signing of the Covenant and Confession of Faith by 30 members of the Orthodox Congregational Church in Grantville. We continued through the spring with a Speakers Series that focused on the historic activities of abolitionists and the temperance movement that led people of faith to conclude that Wellesley Hills (then Grantville, a village of the Town of Needham) to pursue a broader faith vision for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Speakers included:

Dr. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Archer Alexander Distinguished Professor Washington University in St. Louis's John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, University of Washington in St. Louis. Dr. Maffly-Kipp spoke about the historic connections between abolitionism, temperance, women's rights, and the evolution of Congregational ideas.

Dr. Margaret (Peggy) Bendroth, former chief librarian of the Congregational Library in Boston, whose knowledge of the role of the Hills Church in the development of contemporary Congregational thought is unparalleled. Peggy also lives locally in Wellesley. She is a local favorite.

Susan Walton, church historian, conducted a tour of our church campus, including offering historical notes on many of the stained glass windows in both the sanctuary and the chapel. She also worked closely with Noreen Young and Myralee Wilson to locate, enhance, and reproduce numerous black-and-white photographs of the church buildings and activities through the years. These photographs are now displayed throughout the church.

The 175th Anniversary Celebration culminated on the weekend of June 17-18<sup>th</sup> with an outdoor dinner and

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# 2022 Annual Report

live music event on Saturday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, and an indoor worship service in the sanctuary followed by the annual all-church picnic outdoors on Sunday, June 18<sup>th</sup>. All three events were well attended.

## Search and Call

Deacons are responsible for “supplying the pulpit,” meaning that the task of finding a new settled minister falls to the Deacons and their designees. Susie Alexander and Debbie Karlson established a Transition Team whose specific charge was to update the Church Profile, the primary source of information about the church that is available to ministerial candidates. With significant input from the congregation and the Diaconate and guidance from the Edens, the Transition Team published a thorough and current profile of the Hills Church.

Following posting of the position and the accompanying church profile, Gary McCabe led a 7-member search committee to sift through resumes, identify likely candidates, interview candidates, and recommend a candidate for the position of Settled Senior Minister. The Search and Call committee consisted of the following current and past Deacons and active church members: Gary McCabe (chair), Neely Dodge, Becky Lockwood, Cindy Lowe, Jim McKinney, Steven Patrick, and Janice Washburn.

The search committee worked diligently and confidentially throughout the spring and early summer. By mid-August, they had a candidate to recommend to the Deacons. The candidate met in person on August 7 with clergy, co-senior Deacons, and the church Moderator. Following that successful visit, this group recommended that the candidate return in September to meet with the entire Board of Deacons for consideration as the next Settled Senior Minister. Deacons met in person with the candidate, Rev. Jonathon Page, on September 10, and recommended to the congregation on September 11 that he be called to that position. Rev. Page preached on Sunday, September 11; his name was put into nomination; the congregation voted to approve the nomination, and the Search Committee and Deacons began to move forward on planning for the transition to the new minister.

## Remembrances and Celebrations

Memorial services, funeral services, and limited-service memorial teas were conducted several times during the year, including for long-time members Bob Sechrest, Walter Frey, Angela Vanstory Ward (alto soloist for 25 years), Sarah Pedersen (Former Moderator), and Carol Redden. A large funeral was also held for a Wellesley resident who is not a church member. Deacons participated by ushering, providing food, set-up, hosting, and clean-up for the memorial teas.

Baptisms occurred both during worship services and privately after a worship service. Eight children were baptized, representing five church families. Deacons attended the baptisms and supported the families during the ceremonies.

## Other Events

Deacons supported many other church events during the year, including a choir breakfast on Easter Sunday, all-congregation outdoor coffee-and-donuts gatherings at the beginning of Lent and on Easter Sunday, Confirmand Dinner (celebrating 3 years' worth of confirmands), distribution of flowers from the altar arrangement each Sunday to folks in the congregation in need of special prayers or thanks, greeting arriving worshipers on Sunday morning, and delivery of Easter lilies and Christmas poinsettias to grieving or healing members of the congregation during the Easter and Christmas seasons, respectively. Deacons also hosted community hours during the summer months and on other special Sundays outside of the commitments to community hour made by Parish Life.

## Board of Deacons Transitions

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# 2022 Annual Report

Four members of the 2022 Board of Deacons will rotate off the board, most going on to other important leadership positions in the church. We offer thanks and Godspeed to the following departing members: Susie Alexander, Gary McCabe, Marilyn Nutting, and Steven Patrick.

Four members originally schedule to rotate off in 2022 have agreed to serve another one-year term: Mimi D'Angelo, Barbara Farmer (becoming a co-senior deacon), Steve Groff (continuing as co-senior deacon), Janeen Hansen. We thank these Deacons for continuing for another year. All expressed great interest in facilitating the transition to our incoming Settled Senior Minister.

With gratitude to all who have served in 2022, we offer this Annual Report to the Congregation.

We look toward 2023 with great optimism for rebuilding our congregation and for increasing in-person participation in all events, and in grateful thanksgiving for the many blessings of this church and its devoted membership.

Respectfully submitted,

*Steve Groff and Janeen Hansen*

*Co-senior Deacons, 2022*

# 2022 Annual Report

## CARE TEAM MINISTRY

Every week in worship we are reminded that Jesus named the two most important commandments, one of them being “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Hills Church Care Team members embody that care and compassion to members of the congregation: individuals reach out to those who had lost loved ones, encourage those going through illness and difficult times, and provide tangible support to individuals and families who need meals.

Each week the pastors review the known pastoral needs of the congregation and decide how best to extend care. Suggestions are distributed via email to one of the four Care Team leaders as well as to members of the Board of Deacons. Using this model, any member of the week’s scheduled team, as well as members of the Board of Deacons, may respond, depending on inclination and availability. The combined ministry of the Care Teams invigorates the Hills Church with cards and calls, meals, rides, and visits, gracing the congregation with hundreds of kindnesses.



One of the graces of this ministry is that there are no monthly meetings! Instead, the ministry works through a web of interconnection among pastors, team leaders, care teams and deacons. Rev. Judy Swahnberg implements this ministry, working with Saranel McGuirk, the Care Team Coordinator as well as a team captain, and team leaders Becky Lockwood, Mary Ellen Dinwoodey and Lori Janiuk, who all possess broad knowledge of the congregation.

Individuals participate as the Spirit moves, more on some weeks than others. Members may also bow out at any time with our thanks.

We hope that this model of inviting, participating, and releasing with thanks encourages spirit-led acts of kindness, and promotes the health and wholeness of the church community.

The Care Team ministry is celebrated in a springtime worship service and, in non-COVID times, with a thank you brunch for Care Team members, organized, and hosted by Care Team Alumna Kelly Ford. We hope to reinstitute the brunch in Spring 2023.

During February 2023 there will be an “enrollment period” when individuals who wish to join the Care Teams are invited to join. Please consider joining us in our ministry, glimpsing God in our midst, in our shared joys and sorrows.

Thank you to all Care Team members who have given of their time and talent to make God’s presence visible at the Hills Church.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Judy Swahnberg

# 2022 Annual Report

## MORNING MEDITATION 2022

### Walking Together as We Practice our Faith

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

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

Although church life resumed this past year following the pandemic-related suspension of our in-person gatherings, participants opted to continue to meet virtually to enable all who wished to attend to do so. And despite being apart, for those who gathered to share this time together, it has been a rich experience of community, compassion, and glimmers of God’s Word in this stillness.

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



A summer meditation series on **Finding the Sacred in the Natural World** drawing on a variety of sources such as scripture, images, and poetry;

Peter Traben Haas' book *Centering Prayers, a Daily Companion for Going Deeper into the Love of God*;

Mindfulness essentials of Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh;

Reflections on Advent from *Meditations of the Heart* by Howard Thurman, Theologian

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

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Hill Canavan and Rev. Judy Swahnberg*

# 2022 Annual Report

## SENIOR MINISTRY TEAM

During 2022 the Seniors Ministry Team, although still influenced by the shadow of Covid, continued its mission of outreach and care for the senior members of our congregation. Some older members remain isolated from extended family and from church life, and we have tried to remain a presence for them through individual contacts. We delivered Valentines and bags of cookies to our seniors in February and have kept in touch with many of them with phone calls, birthday cards, and personal notes. Our clergy liaison, Rev. Judy Swanhberg, has been able to make in-person visits to many who have health concerns, and she is a vital link for us as we care and pray for our beloved older members.

This fall we have started to look at our community of seniors to assess their needs and perhaps redefine our activities. The definition of “senior” varies widely, but we realized that the church has a large cohort of members aged 65 to 80 – and, full disclosure, that group includes our ministry team members. Many of us have questions about what lies ahead. Do we stay in our family home? Downsize to an apartment or condo or move to a continuing care community? Should we be closer to family members? And if we make a change – what do we do with all the “stuff”? The Seniors Team organized a well-attended luncheon and panel discussion in November to hear from church members who have already made a change or are trying to figure out what is next – and the conversation that followed was lively and provocative. We realized that there is no one answer, but the questions raised were important ones. Significantly, many attendees noted how important the Hills Church is in their lives and were concerned about the effect any future decision might have on those deep ties and relationships.

Finally, we ended the year with our Christmas recital by our beloved musicians John Finney and Laurie Stewart Otten. In the midst of the “holiday crazies” this event always provides an interlude of lovely Christmas carols and music, and we are so grateful for the many years that John and Laurie have joined their talents and lifted our spirits. Attendees also went home with a bag of homemade cookies and holiday treats!

With many thanks to Judy Swahnberg and the members of the Seniors Ministry Team – Wendy Baker, Becky Epstein, Alice Mullen, and Tina Vasconcelles. Saranel McGuirk is our honorary member who conducts a beautiful greeting card ministry.

*Susan Walton and Lucy Sur, Co-chairs*



# 2022 Annual Report

## MUSIC MINISTRY

For the Music Programs at the Hills Church, the year 2022 began cautiously and slowly, as we continued to contend with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the month of January 2022, in-person choir rehearsals were replaced by Zoom sessions, and worship services on Sunday mornings took place with no congregation present (with music provided by the soloists and myself). How grateful we were on February 6 to return to in-person worship, with full choir and congregation!

As much as we hoped to return to our normal (pre-pandemic) routine after February 2022, precautionary protocols have remained in place, including distanced seating for the choir, with the wearing of masks optional (and frequently encouraged). We yearn for the day when all congregation and choir members will once again feel comfortable enough to return to in-person gatherings. The live-streaming of our worship services does allow people to “attend” our services from home, and we are so grateful for the superb camera work of our sound technicians Kenny Goshgarian and Steven Hopkins, as well as for the work of our own Bill Spencer in creating the “lead-ins” for each service.

Some of the musical highlights of 2022 include:

**Easter 2022:** Our first in-person Easter services since 2019! Our sanctuary was filled with joyous worshipers for both services; our Chancel Choir and The Hills Bells were joined by the Gainsborough Brass Ensemble.

The **175th Anniversary of the Hills Church**, celebrated with a spectacular party on the lawn of the parsonage on Saturday, June 11, and a glorious service on Sunday morning June 12.

**Special Music Sunday, December 11, 2022:** Our first “Special Music Sunday” since December 2019! Our Chancel Choir presented Conrad Susa’s “Carols and Lullabies” accompanied by harp, guitar, and marimba.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Christian Figueroa in June; Christian had been our Tenor Soloist for 15 years, and he felt this was the time for him to move on. We wish him well in all his future endeavors! We gladly welcomed Michael Calmés as our new Tenor Soloist in late June. Our excellent soloists (Laurie Stewart Otten, soprano; Shannon Lebrón, mezzo-soprano; Michael Calmés, tenor; and Garrett Murphy, baritone; along with frequent guest soloist Stephen Lebrón, baritone) present wonderful solos, and also serve as the Section Leaders for our amazing Chancel Choir.

Our Chancel Choir and Soloists came together to provide magnificent music of strength and comfort for the funeral of our former Soprano Soloist, Angela Vanstory Ward, in August, and for the memorial service for our beloved Moderator Sarah Pedersen in September.\

The Hills Bells and Chancel Choir and Soloists presented “An Afternoon of Christmas Music” on December 17. And our newly-formed “Children’s Christmas Choir” filled our sanctuary with the joyous sounds of “Go, Tell It on the Mountain” on December 18. Many thanks to Emily Gauthier for her excellent work as our Director of Children’s Music, and for creating and directing our Children’s Christmas Choir!

I owe special thanks and deep gratitude to Martha Stowell for her volunteer work as founder and Director of The Hills Bells. She works tirelessly to find beautiful repertoire for bells, and encourages and inspires the

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# 2022 Annual Report

members of The Hills Bells in the preparation of exquisite music to enhance our worship services.

It has been a joy to work alongside our Interim Co-Senior Ministers Jill and Rick Edens for these past 16 months, and I will always be grateful to them for their strong leadership, their wisdom, and their compassion. It continues to be a joy to work with our Associate Ministers Judy Swahnberg and Anne Marie Holloway and our Director of Children's Ministry Sally Tomasetti. And I look forward to working with our new Senior Minister Jonathan Page beginning in January 2023.

With the full support of our clergy and moderators, I made an announcement to the entire Hills Church Community in March 2022, to inform everyone of my upcoming retirement. I will be retiring in the summer of 2023, after having served as Director of Music for the Hills Church since September 1984. It has literally been decades since the Hills Church has needed to find a new Director of Music. So, on the advice of our Interim Co-Senior-Ministers Jill and Rick Edens, it was decided to create a "Music Discernment Committee," charged with examining the role of music at the Hills Church and surveying the congregation for their input. Please take time to read the excellent report of the Music Discernment Committee for the details of their diligent work! I am confident that, with the results of their report, and with the support of our new Senior Minister Jonathan Page, the search for a new Director of Music will be successfully launched early in 2023.

It would take many volumes for me to recount everything that I cherish about the Hills Church! So I hope it will suffice for now to say that I will carry the Hills Church in my heart forever!

John Finney, Director of Music



# 2022 Annual Report

## MUSIC DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

### **Mission:**

In anticipation of John Finney's retirement in summer 2023 as our Director of Music, our committee was constituted to help lay the groundwork for the next chapter of music at the Hills Church. The Music Discernment Committee (MusD) was tasked with seeking input from the congregation to discern what we as a church value about our current music program, and what our hopes are for the future music program as we anticipate searching for and welcoming a new Director of Music.

### **2022 Accomplishments:**

MusD distributed a congregational survey about the music program in July and August 2022. We received 163 responses to the survey. We hosted eleven forums and focus groups from mid-September to the end of October 2022 which were attended by 43 people in total. We published a summary of the findings from the survey and focus groups/forums in a brief report that was distributed to the entire congregation in an email blast, in the weekly Events newsletter, in hard copy in the church narthex, and on the church website.

Our second major task was to draft a job description for the Director of Music position. The job description was guided by the summary report and all the input we received from the congregation. We wrote the job description in such a way that it can be either full- or part-time, depending on experience, training and preference of a successful candidate. The job description has been designed to allow the Music Search Committee the widest possible arrangement of full- to part-time positions in order to hire the best possible candidate(s) to mount a music program that meets the needs of the congregation.

The summary document and job description will be presented at the December 11 meeting of the Deacons and the December 12 meeting of Church Council. These two documents and accompanying notes will be passed on to the members of the Music Search Committee that will begin its work in January 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

*Angela Bahns and Becky Williams, Co-Chairs*

*Members: Andrew Altenbach, Angela Bahns, Steve Groff, Anne Lysaght, Beth Ross, Becky Williams*



# 2022 Annual Report

## PARISH LIFE MINISTRY TEAM

### **Mission:**

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

### **2022 Accomplishments:**

First, while saying good-bye to Anne Lysaght, we welcomed 2 new people to our team – Vickie Batka and Dana Brennan.

It is with great joy that Parish Life (AKA The Party Committee) was able to resume hosting several events after the interruption of Covid. We have sponsored many Community Hours, a Pride Picnic, Rally Day ice cream social, Souper Sunday to accompany the celebration of the Pumpkin Patch's success, and the Advent Dinner which accompanied the Advent Workshop. Upcoming events include participating in the good-bye celebration for our interim Senior Ministers, Rick and Jill Edens, and the Hoedown.

A significant change that occurred due to Covid was that Parish Life shared in the support needed for many fun events. This has continued as we partner with Children's Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Deacons in bringing social events for those of all ages to our church family.

### **Hopes for 2023:**

It is our hope that we can continue to provide a variety of food-centered opportunities for church members of all ages to come together to laugh, to make new friends, and to feel God's presence in our midst. We also hope to have some of our youth join our ministry team so we can be representative of the entire congregation.

### **Members:**

Rob Andrews, Angela Bahns, Vickie Batka, Dana Brennan, Paul Bruchez, Mimi D'Angelo, Mary Ellen Dinwoodey, Lori Janiuk, Debbie Karlson, Marilyn Nutting, and David Otten have had the pleasure of friendship.

Respectfully submitted,

*Mimi D'Angelo, Co-Chair*





# 2022 Annual Report

## USHERING MINISTRY TEAM

During the past year ushering at the Hills Church has been organized by the Ushering Ministry Team (UMT) with the help of SignUpGenius and a list of about 24 individuals who have ushered in the past. For most services, we use two ushers. This year we had 4 ushers for Palm Sunday and 4 ushers for each of two services on Easter Sunday. Christmas has not happened yet but the plan is to have 6 ushers at each of two services on Christmas Eve.

Due to the Omicron virus, all in-person services were canceled during the month of January 2022. In-person services were restarted in February. Starting February 6<sup>th</sup> and continuing through June 12<sup>th</sup>, all ushers were recruited by the UMT. From June 19<sup>th</sup> through September 11<sup>th</sup>, the ushers were supplied by the Deacons. From September 18<sup>th</sup> to the end of the year, the ushers were again recruited by the UMT.

Respectfully submitted,

*David Otten*

## Community Hour Ministry Team

During the past year community hour at the Hills Church was organized primarily by the Community Hour Ministry Team (CHMT).

Due to the Omicron virus, all in-person services were canceled during the month of January. When in-person worship was restarted in February, it was done without community hour. Community hour in the assembly room was finally authorized on March 6<sup>th</sup>. In anticipation of that, an outdoor community hour called Holy Donuts was celebrated on February 27<sup>th</sup>. Most community hours in the spring including Palm Sunday and Easter were outdoor events. During the summer from June 19<sup>th</sup> through September 11<sup>th</sup>, community hour was provided by the Deacons. Starting with Rally Day on September 18<sup>th</sup>, it again came under the auspices of the CHMT.

During this past year the community hour time slot has often been used for special celebrations. The Edens celebrated their 70<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Pastor Parish celebrated Rev. Judy Swahnberg's ordination anniversary. Faith and Fun organized a soup swap on one Sunday and a cookie swap on a different Sunday. The pumpkin patch ministry team together with Parish Life celebrated a successful pumpkin patch operation by serving pumpkin soup and bread. A goodbye party for the Edens will be celebrated during community hour. Of course the Rally Day ice cream social and end of year All Church Picnic always occur after church during community hour.

Though community hour has been often used in new and novel ways, it is not always easy to find people to take responsibility for community hour during normal Sundays. A small committee of Mimi D'Angelo, Marbo Hansen, and David Otten has met several times during the past year to identify a more robust way to organize community hour. This work is ongoing.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*David Otten*

# 2022 Annual Report

## WELCOMING ONA/DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION TASK FORCE

On June 5, 2011, at a Special Meeting, the members of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church voted unanimously to become an Open and Affirming church, adopting the following Welcome Statement:

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

In 2021, as we celebrated a decade of being an Open and Affirming church, the Board of Deacons formed our current Task Force and asked us to express welcome to the LGBTQ+ community (ONA). Every worship service at the Hills Church begins with a heartfelt welcome that is also printed on orders of worship, yet when COVID protocols mandated shifting worship online, the ONA Task Force identified the need to work on signage: how the church might publicly express the extravagant welcome the congregation had ratified over a decade ago.

The Hills Church now publicly demonstrates our welcome to all by displaying:

- four multicolored Adirondack-style chairs positioned on our front lawn
- a rainbow banner on the exterior wall of Wallace Chapel and flags along the front walkway
- welcoming policies and icons displayed on the new website

Upon close inspection of the existing Hills Church sign on the front lawn, we discovered that the sign is in disrepair, rotting, and needs replacement. The Task force recommends:

- a new sign on the front lawn and
- a rainbow strip be added to a new sign as a sign of welcome to the LGBTQ+ community.

The ONA group is now working toward continuing the discussion of the role of the Hills Church in living out our commitment to the LGBTQ+ community.

### Values that guide us:

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

### What we worked towards in 2022:

1. To educate the congregation about the need for ONA and why it is the church's work.
  - It is what Jesus has called us to do: living out God's hope for all God's children
  - Designate ONA group as a ministry team to clarify its role in the life of the church
2. To have more people in the congregation be comfortable understanding language and being able to speak about issues of the LGBT+ community.

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# 2022 Annual Report

- For people to gain more awareness and bring attention to the issues
- 3. To support and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community
  - When people can be themselves it leads to a healthier community/congregation for all
- 4. To make sure the LGBTQ+ community and all its members feel welcome at the Hills Church

## What we accomplished in 2022:

- Development of Strategic Plan (hopes & outcomes/Values/Actions) to include our mission statement.

## Mission:

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

- Recommendations for recent children’s and adult books on LGBTQ+ issues, led by Sally Tomasetti from the church and librarians from the Wellesley Public Library.
- Information shared from Southern New England UCC workshop on “You’re ONA! What’s Next?” 28 people attended the Dec. 5, 2022, Zoom presentation led by experienced social worker, Dana Zais, in a conversation on understanding various gender terms and the importance of using affirming and appropriate pronouns.
- Addition of books to the church library with monetary gift.

## Hope for 2023:

Our clergy have been committed and valuable partners throughout the years and we look forward to the engagement and profound guidance of our new senior minister Jonathan Page as we continue our commitment to the LGBTQ+ community, both within our congregation and outside of the walls of the sanctuary. Things will likely change, and our expressions of welcome will have to keep pace, but we go forward with great hope, guided by the prophet Micah’s words, “. . . *what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.*” (Micah 6:8)

## Members:

*Mimi D’Angelo, Kelly Ford, Mary Hill Canavan, Reverend Anne Marie Holloway, Gary McCabe, JoAnna McKinney, Steven Patrick, Pete Pedersen, Lucy Sur, Reverend Judy Swahnberg, Anna Thomas, Sally Tomasetti*



# 2022 Annual Report

## RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Our Values that will Guide Us***

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

We will strive to work with:

- Open eyes
- Softened hearts
- Humility
- Courage

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

1. Tell the truth about our racial history.
2. Take intentional actions to become anti-racist.
3. Recognize, and be attentive to, disordered imaginations that nurture and passively permit racism.

**With our dream and goals in mind we offered these activities in 2022:**

- Hosted a second showing and discussion of [Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North](#).
- Took part in the African American History of Concord Walking Tour.

# 2022 Annual Report

- Participated in Wellesley community read of Caste, followed with a presentation by the author, Isabella Wilkerson.
- Hosted discussion of The Cross and the Lynching Tree by James H. Cone.
- Hosted discussion group of Stamped by Jason Reynolds.
- Attended the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project program.
- Planned a walking tour of the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, which was postponed due to weather and will be offered again in spring, 2023.
- Developed a user-friendly page for the new church website.
- Began analyzing the publication, The Process for Becoming a Racial Justice Church (provided by the Racial Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference United Church of Christ) for our use.
- Attended the Southern New England Justice Conference.
- Posted (in Events) listings of businesses owned by black, Indigenous and people of color for holiday (and everyday) shopping.
- Posted (in Events) a list of racial justice books.
- Displayed Nativity scenes from different cultures around the church.
- Introduced Nativity scenes from other cultures onto Events pages.

## For 2023

The Racial Justice Working Group continues to work together with the church community to realize our vision of seeking, creating, and living into the promise of God's Beloved Community, celebrating diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Faithfully submitted,

*Mimi D'Angelo, Rev. Dr. Jill Edens, Rev. Rick Edens. Kelly Ford, Mark Fraga, Mary Hill Canavan, Rev. Anne Marie Holloway, Lori Januik, KC Kranker, Laurie Otten, Kerz Poku, Nana Poku, Patty Sibanda, Rev. Judy Swahnberg*



# 2022 Annual Report

## WOMEN'S MINISTRY

Women's Ministry has served the Wellesley Hills Church for over 100 years providing support to Women, families and the congregation at large through their many inreach and outreach programs. These included the annual Rummage Sale, Women's Retreat, Bake Sale, Knitting and Quilting Groups. Many of these opportunities were time honored events that we all looked forward to.

Most of these activities have been postponed the last several years due to the virus. As the virus is still present we have not felt comfortable or ready to restart in person programs. We have, however, made donations this year to the following charities: Thom Charles River Early Intervention Center, Help Kids India, Honduras Hope Nutrition Program, and Small Acts for Sustainability Women's Health Projects. In addition, we continue to support the knitting projects: Baptismal Blankets, Prayer Shawls, Graduation Scarves, and Baby's caps.

We see this "pause" as a good opportunity to rethink how Women's Ministry can best provide outreach to our Church families and Community in the reality that we live in today. Perhaps activities like our Rummage Sale could become a joint effort with another Church(s) in the Community. Our beloved knitters and quilters could be stand alone Ministry Teams.

We believe that Women's Ministry is a viable part of our Church and we look forward to seeking out new opportunities to serve all the members of our Church and community. The timely arrival of our new minister, Jonathan Page will provide us with additional guidance as we move forward.

A word from Hills Church Quilters:

- Quilting and sewing are part of a long tradition at the Hills Church, joining hands and hearts in service to the community.
- Church school students participated in designing the Christian Symbols quilt that hangs in the Assembly room. They also made quilts for the Grow Clinic at Boston Medical Center.
- More recently, the Hills Quilters have made quilts for Family Promise Metrowest, memory quilts for church members who have lost loved ones, and much desired potholders for sale at the traditional December Bake Sale. They have expanded into sewing bags and aprons with repurposed material. They even had an exhibit of their quilts at the Andover Newton gallery in Newton.
- Just as important as their creations has been their fellowship through time together, akin to the traditional quilting bee. With Covid, that benefit of coming together has waned. We hope to renew the group with new members and ideas.

Respectfully submitted,

*Laurie Stewart Otten, Team leader*  
*Dottie McLaughlin, Scribe*  
*Bev St. Clair, Hills Church Quilters*

# 2022 Annual Report

## PROPERTY MAINTENANCE MINISTRY TEAM

The most significant event for PMC this year was the addition to the church staff of a part time Facilities Manager in June. Joe Brady began work in August, bringing with him a broad range of skills to manage all property care and maintenance issues, from small hands-on fixes, to vendor management, selection and oversight. Joe reports directly to and coordinates property work with Andrea Bellarosa, our new church administrator, who also joined the staff in June. The addition of these two managers to the staff will necessitate a revision of the PMC oversight role in 2023.

The year opened with continued adjustment to the complexities of the new BMS system. Betty Ule continued to monitor and manipulate the new HVAC settings remotely. Jeff Lussier's month-to-month consulting agreement (\$2,500 / mo.) was extended through September to continue adjustments and fixes to the new systems and to facilitate BMS training with Joe and Andrea and other staff.

### Exterior

- Two vendors were replaced by a single new one: K & S Landscaping will work year-round with the expanded assignment of snow plowing through the winter. (The termination of Indresano for snowplowing means the fourth bay in the parsonage garage is now available since their bobcat loader was removed. Likewise, their trailer will no longer be parked year-round in a corner of the West lot.)
- A smaller dumpster dedicated to recyclables (single stream) was added to the larger one for trash in the NE corner of the property. Both dumpsters now are locked to eliminate non-church dumping.
- A new vendor will focus on regular gutter cleaning on all church buildings to eliminate internal and external water and ice damage.
- Annual pruning work by Harrison McPhee will continue. This work is separate from any lesser pruning of shrubs by K & S.
- Driveway speed strips and signs were added in an attempt to reduce the speeding and the wrong way driving on Chapel Place. In addition, the cut through gate in the west side parking lot which leads to the Wellesley Community Center is now locked. This has eliminated cars racing through the parking lot.
- In the East parking lot, a badly sunken storm drain was rebuilt.
- Three deteriorated basement window well covers in the garth were removed and replaced in kind by Mac Munro, a church member, as an Eagle Scout community project. Mac contributed all the planning, sourcing of materials and labor. (Our thanks to Mac and all who assisted him with this project!)
- Several large hornet's nests in the playground and on the outside of the Youth room were removed/destroyed.
- Roof slates over the library are being scheduled to be repaired before the end of the year.

### Interior

- An infestation of powder post beetles in the assembly room baseboards was treated by removing baseboards, treating of the affected substructure by Terminex and replacing with new baseboards and molding. Painting and caulking remain to be done in 2023.

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- The small bathroom in the minister's office has been repainted, new sink/vanity installed, new toilet seat installed. Other updates / improvements are still needed.
- The main elevator emergency phone line has been repaired.
- Lock and door closure problems were fixed in the North narthex, the garth entrance, Wallace Chapel and the main entrance from the East lot.
- During October, a little fall cleaning was done in the shed and other areas of the church property.

## **Security**

To increase the security and safety of the nursery school and staff, the West Entrance is now locked. The East Entrance is open during office hours. 2023 updates will be made to the door security.

## **Other**

A new phone (VOIP) system will be up and running by the end of year.

The church is now using the WellesleyNET - Wellesley Municipal Light Plant - Internet Service.

Faithfully.

George Pettee

Property Maintenance Ministry Team

# 2022 Annual Report

## TECHNOLOGY:

### Livestream and the Hills Church

Since July 2021, the church services have been coming live to your living rooms, your vacation spots, your phones, and all over the world. Over 100 videos have now been produced! And you can watch the replay any time, anywhere, and at your own convenience. This is the Hills Church Livestream.

If you haven't experienced this yet go to the church's website, look for the Livestream link on the church's home page. Or follow the menus for Worship & Music -- Watch Sunday Worship. You can also find the Wellesley Hills Church Youtube site which contains all the videos.

We typically get about 100+ views of each service (and often each view includes multiple people), with about 20 to 45 watching simultaneously with the service, another 40 or 50 watch the replay during the day Sunday, and another 25 to 50 watch during the week.

This past year we acquired and started using more new technology thanks to donations from members of the church. This includes a higher throughput video/gaming computer, a third PTZ camera, a handheld BlackMagic professional video camera, two large portable display monitors and other miscellaneous items. We've been able to put all this to good use. But, we are still learning, and working to improve and will welcome others who wish to help.

#### **You can Participate!**

One of our major goals has been to simplify the process of recording a service, so that it can be done by a single person with a minimal amount of training. So if you would like to help out, we are happy to let you learn! Most important is a desire to learn video technology and to recognize that through livestream God has given us a means of supporting our church community even when they cannot be here in person.

#### **Special Thanks**

First our thanks to Kenny Goshgarian and Steven Hopkins, our sound and video techs who make this magic happen each Sunday, also help with funerals, weddings, and other services.

Our thanks to the Church Council and the whole church for their support and encouragement in this endeavor, which made it all possible.

Our thanks to John Finney, for his support, and figuring out the licensing requirements for streaming video with music, as well as giving good feedback on sound quality, music and overall production, and being patient with our occasional missteps.

And then thanks to our Technology group with Rob Andrews for their support, and Ted Garland for his wisdom about video production, and a host of others in the congregation and our church staff for all their ideas, content creation, and suggestions for making things better.

Faithfully,

Bill Spencer, Rob Andrews, Ted Garland, Steven Hopkins, Kenny Goshgarian, And again, many thanks to the Ministers, the church staff, and many parishioners who helped along the way with valuable feedback.

**Special Note:** For anyone who would like to help with the livestream, learn the technology, assist our techs during the service, and maybe even run a service in case our technology folks cannot be there, please feel free to reach out to us.

# 2022 Annual Report

## Children's Ministry



Children are a vital part of Hills Church. They are our contributors, attendees, and beloved young members. These children are part of the church now, not just the future, and for this reason, it's important that they feel valued and connected at church. That is why we have seen more of our children in Worship this past year. What a joy it has been to see the children engage in the church community this way. It's a great feeling to have a closer to "normal" pre-covid year as we have been back upstairs and gathering inside with small group lessons again.

The Children's Ministry Staff has been involved in "A Word for all ages" with stories and singing, and we have introduced the PLAY CHURCH concept into the board room. All these moves are designed for children to love being in and feel comfortable in the Worship setting.

This past year, we once again hosted our annual Egg Hunt, Cookies with Santa, and the *open to all* Christmas Pageant returned; all were highly attended by none church members. These community events provide another avenue to bring people from different walks of life together and share in our loving Christian community.



Our  
kids  
in  
Worship!





# 2022 Annual Report



## Children's Ministry did...



**C**reated a new way to Worship with PLAY CHURCH.

**H**elped set up Communion.

**M**any children helped unload pumpkins for the patch.

**P**articipated in the Climate Hope Cards Project.

**S**ponsored a family at Christmas, wrapped presents, and made cards.

**M**ade 28 care bags.

**C**ollected food for the pantry.

**G**athered books for the African Library project.

**G**ave all church families Lent packages and teddy bears.

**P**rayed for the community during Lent.

**S**ent our extra Halloween candy to the veterans.

**D**ecorated 60 Gingerbread houses at the Advent Dinner.

**S**ang in the Children's Choir.





# 2022 Annual Report

## Lawn Art MINISTRY



In the world of COVID, a new ministry grew. These past two years, you could not miss the art on the lawn. The words HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE during Advent, a large heart during Easter, then a prayer for Ukraine, and a 9ft cross for the Lenten season.



We nicknamed this group, The Men and Women of the Letters; however, this is truly an arts ministry. These creative folks made the lawn letters, Lenten heart, and cross. Then decorated and installed each piece.

Our Church community and the Wellesley community are blessed by this Lawn Art Ministry each year. That's why you often find the team planning the next creative opportunity for the lawn.



# 2022 Annual Report

## FAITH FORMATION SUPPORT BOARD

*Yet, O Lord, you are our God;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand."  
—Isaiah 64:8*

*Faith formation is at the heart of Christian life and community. As we participate in the practices of our daily lives and the rituals of our faith communities through worship, mission, working for justice and peace, evangelism, and education our faith is formed, sustained, and nurtured.*

—The United Church of Christ

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

The Faith Formation Support Board (FFSB) met monthly this year, primarily by Zoom. As fear of the pandemic lessened and our church doors began to open once again, much of our focus was on re-engaging with the congregation and families in worship and church life. FFSB met with Children's Ministry Director Sally Tomasetti as well as Deacon Barbara Farmer to discern how FFSB might help support this effort to rebuild community among the congregation and in particular, young families with children.

More broadly, a new landscape of ministry is developing in children's faith formation, where to quote the United Church of Christ, "the practices of our daily lives and the rituals of our faith communities" are taking place not only at church and in worship, but at home and between generations as well. FFSB is looking forward to consider how it might support the effort to revive a group of people in discernment for this next phase of children's ministry.

FFSB has also looked for ways to nurture the deepening and strengthening of faith in the life of our church day to day. As the church year got underway, FFSB provided resources to support lay leaders in their ministries. In addition, it placed messages in meeting rooms, blessing the sacred spaces where ministries, support boards, and staff met. It is our hope that these small steps will enhance the feeling of being grounded in faith as the business of the church is conducted.

### **Programmatic Blessings of Faith Formation at the Hills in 2022**

- Lenten and Fall devotional Series for Busy People (Book Groups.)
- Supporting Gifts of Devotional and Prayer Resources sent to Shepherds of Ministry Teams
- Prayer App Group
- Blessing our Sacred on-site spaces with Jars of Joy
- Spiritual Wellness series
- Rally Day Ministry Fair
- Building Community within the Church: Faith and Fun Ministries
- Floral Design, Fall Hikes, Nature Walk, Fly Tying, Soup Swap, Christmas Cookie Swap
- A Cup of Monday Morning Prayer (FB LIVE)

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# 2022 Annual Report

- Noontime Prayers from the Hills (FB LIVE)
- Tuesday Morning Meditation on ZOOM
- Reengagement of Young Families: Sunday night Family Dinner Chapel, Playground Coffee Hour, Holy Questions (6 week) Sunday morning parent gathering
- Songs of Justice Music Concert with Jenny Bonham Carter

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

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Anne Marie Holloway

Co-Chairs David Otten and Mary Hill Canavan

# 2022 Annual Report



## NEW BEGINNINGS WELLESLEY HILLS, INC.

New Beginnings Wellesley Hills, Inc. has entered our 34th year, continuing our mission to maintain a safe environment for adults to heal emotionally, spiritually, physically, and psychologically from the loss of a relationship due to spousal or family death, divorce, separation, or other personal trauma. We are a self-directed, peer-to-peer, volunteer organization normally meeting weekly.

Covid-19 has continued to complicate our planning, and we find it is still affecting the ability to carry out our mission and creating financial challenges. Our organization's foundation and strengths are person-to-person support and empathy. While we are now back at the church (yay!) - we still are struggling with getting folks to come in person. This is also why we have been and will continue hosting our virtual meetings every week, so we can reach as many people as we can. Some people will choose to remain in isolation out of an abundance of caution, and isolation is the #1 enemy of grief. We are looking forward to more stability as folks become less fearful this coming year.

In the face of the "new normal" of 2022, myself and my team have continued to manage and maintain the key administrative, outreach and compliance functions needed to keep the organization moving forward. The Board of Trustees continues to thank us for our dedication and tireless efforts in 2022.

New Beginnings offers a supportive and consistent environment for those we seek to help. While we are not professional counsellors, it is well documented that peer-facilitated small support groups are powerful tools that provide individualized attention, support, and comfort for healing from the trauma of loss. This has been the core of New Beginnings since our founding more than three decades ago. Our success also results from dedicated hard-working volunteers who help further the New Beginnings mission.

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

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

We welcome any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me at [jodipettingill@hotmail.com](mailto:jodipettingill@hotmail.com), or Sara Kennedy at [sdkenedy84@yahoo.com](mailto:sdkenedy84@yahoo.com).

Respectfully submitted,

*Jodi Pettingill*

Director

New Beginnings Wellesley Hills, Inc.

The Board of Trustees Jodi Pettingill, Elliot Simons, Mary Bruni, Michael Carlton, Sara Kennedy, Susan Gordon



# 2022 Annual Report

## WELLESLEY NURSERY SCHOOL IN THE HILLS

*"You, like the little caterpillar, will grow up, unfold your wings and fly off into the future"*

(Eric Carle)

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



The return to school this fall brought with it excitement and a sense of normalcy. Parents attended our in person "Parent Night" and children visited their classrooms during orientation. All of the classes have enjoyed welcoming parents into the school during the day as guest readers, for birthday celebrations and to help during special events. In addition, Music and Imagination, Puddlestompers and Be Ahead of the Game, our monthly enrichment specialists, have returned to provide interactive programs to all of the classes.

WNSH's current school enrollment has increased steadily over the past three years. Our enrollment grew from 40 students in 2020-2021, to 65 students in 2021-2022, to 69 students in 2022-23. Registration for the 2023-24 school year is underway and we are currently at 68 registered students with limited remaining spaces. Returning students/siblings and new families from Wellesley, Weston, Needham, Natick and Medfield make up the current enrollment numbers. With an increase in students, the rooms are staffed with two Lead Teachers and one Assistant Teacher. This allows us to maintain a low "student to teacher" ratio in each classroom. Families appreciate our ability to provide small group instruction and believe this sets us apart from other nursery school programs.



In addition, the Extended Day Program is offered three days per week from October - June. Children in PS1 & PS2 stay until 1:30 or 2:30 pm, enjoy lunch with friends, have extra playground time, and participate in stories and activities. PK & TK have an Extended Day option from 1:30-2:30 pm where they enjoy group games, special classroom activities and time on the playground. After discussions with staff, the Advisory Board and families, WNSH has added two additional weeks to the school calendar, now extending the school year. This replaces the previous optional two week summer program and gives all children the opportunity to further their learning into June.

As we look ahead to 2023, WNSH anticipates full classroom enrollment, a large extended day group and multiple opportunities for families to become partners in their child's educational journey. Our teachers continue to provide positive social and learning experiences for the children of Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills, making us one of the most desirable, respected preschools in the area.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Melanie Dawson, Director*

# 2022 Annual Report

WELLESLEY FOOD PANTRY



## Background

Wellesley's houses of worship came together in 1989 to create the Wellesley Food Pantry, operating under the tax umbrella of Wellesley Friendly Aid. The original mission statement has remained unchanged over the years: *To provide supplemental and emergency food to Wellesley residents in need.*

Originally located at the Village Church, WFP quickly outgrew the available space and relocated to the Hills Church in the early 1990's. WFP became an independent nonprofit in 2011, acquiring 501(c)(3) tax status.

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

## Current Operation

Since the fall of 2021, we have been using the assembly room to sort food donations on Monday afternoons and both the assembly room and kitchen on Tuesday afternoons and the second Tuesday evening of the month: the assembly room for clients to wait their turn to pick out their food without crowding together, and the kitchen for distribution of fresh produce.

Clients come to the pantry by appointment. We are currently serving 175 households (the number can fluctuate on a weekly basis) made up of 364 individuals. 45% of our clients are age 60 or older; 26% are 18 or younger. Most families come to us for food once a month, although a handful come twice a month.

We have been generously supported by the Wellesley community, including WHCC, with both food and financial donations, and the vast majority of the funds we receive go to purchasing food. We purchase hundreds of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each week. We also purchase meat, fish, frozen juice, frozen vegetables, frozen berries, cheese, egg beaters, and tofu for our refrigerators and freezers. We also buy nonperishable food, laundry detergent, paper towels, and toilet tissue when community donations are insufficient for our shelves to remain fully stocked. We are fortunate to have a wonderful donor who brings us dozens of jugs of milk every week.

The Hills Church has been an amazing partner in our shared mission to provide food to those in need, and our Board is so grateful for all the support you have provided over the years, most especially in the past few years with the extra challenges of covid. We appreciate the faithful service of WHCC parishioners currently volunteering at WFP, including Tricia Frank (also a board member), Chris Anne Banks, Tina Vasconcelles, and Bob Minetti.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Cynthia Scott, Director*

# 2022 Annual Report

## SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY TEAM

### **Mission**

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

### **2022 Accomplishments**

We welcomed new team members to the Safe Church Committee; Barbara Farmer, Karen Gunn and Karl Karlson. Discussed the potential for a need for additional safety procedures in relation to outside threats. Raised these concerns with Wellesley Police Department (WPD) in a discussion forum about policies, facility, and procedures. Facility was assessed by WPD along with Safe Church Ministry Team and report generated.

### **Hopes for 2023**

Discuss and implement updates to church security system recommended by the WPD report. Update current Safe Church Policy to reflect recommendations of WPD. Review and potentially implement facility security infrastructure. Discuss and potentially implement new training procedures for outside threats.

### **Members**

Barbara Farmer, Karen Gunn, Karl Karlson, Nick Bahns, Rev. Anne Marie Holloway

*Respectfully Submitted,*

Nick Bahns (Chair)

# 2022 Annual Report

## MEMBERSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

In 2020 and 2021 Church Council received reports from three different task forces which had been charged with reviewing the church's strategic vision, its governance, and its financial management. Remarkably, all three identified the vital importance of growing and developing our membership. In response, Church Council and the Spiritual Care Support Board (SCSB) decided to elevate its membership group to the level of a ministry team and increase its numbers. The Membership Ministry Team is still supported by the SCSB and includes two members who serve concurrently on it. Currently the members include: Becky Epstein, Barbara Farmer (SCSB liaison), Jill Edens, Rick Edens, Anne-Marie Holloway (co-chair), Chris Stowell (co-chair), Brad Tomlinson (SCSB liaison) and Myralee Wilson. The MMT first met during the Summer of 2021.

Broadly speaking the MMT has three charges:

- Outreach – inviting the community to our church and community

- On-boarding of new members – engaging visitors and prospective members and transitioning them to membership

- Development of current members – enriching the lives of current members and helping them to find meaningful roles in our church community

This past year we have carried out several projects addressing these charges. Many of them involved collaboration with and contribution from others in our church community including the clergy, Andrea Bellarosa, Noreen Young, the SCSB, and the Website Development Team which we gratefully acknowledge. These projects included the following:

- Re-doing the section of the website targeted at inquirers/prospective new members

- Placing additional welcoming signage in- and out-side the church

- Mailing post cards about church events (Rally Day, Easter Egg Hunt, Advent events) to selected targets (e.g. recent home buyers in Wellesley, recent home buyers in surrounding towns, Wellesley residential addresses)

- Supporting the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration by staffing the welcome table and organizing the displays of historical photographs and posters listing members by decade of joining

- Recreating a database for tracking visitors and prospective members

- Initiating first and second 'touch' communications with visitors

- Reviewing and cleaning up the membership database and contacting inactive members, in collaboration with clergy, the SCSB and long-time members

- Printing business-type cards with church contact information and our Qcode to distribute to visitors

- Initiating 'A Good Five Minutes' with clergy for visitors after the church service

- Replacing/making new name tags for members

In December and January we plan to review and update the list of possible projects that we generated in 2021, and prioritize it for 2023.

Respectfully Submitted for the Membership Ministry Team

Christopher Stowell

# 2022 Annual Report

## PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

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

P&I is responsible for helping to identify a slate of nominees for the Church Council and Offices of the Church, and for the four elected leadership boards (Spiritual Care, Faith Formation, Christian Service, and Stewards) as well as 5 Special Ministry Teams that we both celebrate and present at the Annual Meeting in January. P&I also works with the congregation at large, as well as with our Support Boards, Ministry Teams, and other governing bodies to help match those who want to serve, with those Boards and Teams with needs for service.

This year, we held a Ministry Fair on Rally Day to help members of the church to understand our church's leadership structure and to view some of the many ways members can further our church's mission to care for each other, to nurture each other spiritually and emotionally and to reach out beyond the church's walls to bring Christ's love and care into the larger community. We created calendar deadlines for leaders to let us know their plans for filling positions on their Boards and Ministry Teams. In a time when we continue to be cautious about being in large groups and many people choose to worship and participate virtually, our job to reach church members is complicated – so we have continued to explore creative ways to reach out.

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

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

Faithfully,

Kevin Groppe  
Debby Karlson  
Becky Lockwood

With support from the Ministers, Moderators, Church Council and liaisons from the church's four Support Boards, and the church staff



# 2022 Annual Report

## COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY TEAM

Although Noreen Young has been providing design services to the church for over 20 years, 2022 marked the creation of the Communications Ministry (CMT). The main service provided by the CMT is graphic design and production. Design services include development of mailings, cards, envelopes, letterheads, Orders of Worship, logos, invitations, name tags, and a broad array of other items as needed, including fliers, posters, wall banners, pop-up floor banners, spiral and perfect-bound books and booklets, and more. The services include not just design but contracting for and oversight of production.

The calendar year 2022 was an unusually busy one for the CMT, with over 75 total design and production projects on the docket and countless individual items printed, produced, mailed, distributed, and displayed. Among the projects on the typical church year calendar, each with multiple pieces involved, were Holy Week, Rally Day, the Stewardship campaign, and Advent.

Beyond those on the annual calendar in 2022 were a broad array of special projects, including the celebration of the church's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with its special logo, more than a dozen items for the various events, and a number of items that captured the church's rich history, including scans and prints of historic photographs.

Additionally the Church Council's Strengthening Church Governance Implementation Task Force partnered with the CMT for the design and production of several items, including a new Governance Chart, a flier and floor banner detailing "How Our Church Works," and a revised, updated, and expanded edition of the *Time, Talents & Opportunities* booklet.

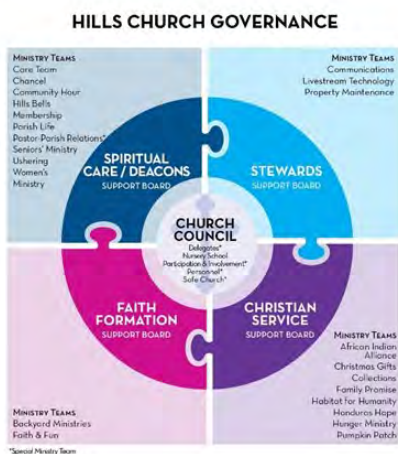
Beyond all of the above the hiring of our new Senior Minister, the Rev. Jonathan Page, called for the creation of a bi-fold flier to introduce him to the congregation.

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

Prayerfully Submitted,

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

# 2022 Annual Report



# 2022 Annual Report

## STEWARDS SUPPORT BOARD

### Operating Results

Our 2022 operating results and the proposed 2023 budget are among the documents in the financial hand-out that is being circulated as a part of the 2023 Annual Meeting. As in prior years, the draft 2022 internal financial statements and 2021 GAAP financial statements, as reviewed by our outside accountants, are available in electronic form from our Administrator.

In 2022, our combined annual revenues were \$1.43 million versus a budget of \$1.26 million. Annual stewardship receipts and gifts for 2022, exclusive of special collections (such as the Easter offering, the Christmas offering, etc.) of \$948,720 was \$57,720 favorable to budget while Nursery School revenues of \$833,268 also exceeded Budget expectations by \$172,775 as student enrollment returned to near capacity. Overall, the Nursery School contributed income, net of expenses of \$383,463 in 2022 versus a budget expectation of \$288,700, augmented by approximately \$94,000 of grants from the State of Massachusetts as well as better than expected enrollment. In addition to the above, the church received other income of \$102,657 comprised of Christmas and Easter offerings, net proceeds from the Pumpkin Patch and miscellaneous donations.

Total expenses for 2022 of \$1.47 million were slightly unfavorable to budget by \$16,158 due primarily to higher Office and Property expenses which included the website upgrade and the addition of a new part-time Sexton. These increases were partially offset by lower HR costs as we had budgeted for our new minister to come on board in the fourth quarter of 2022.

### Investment Results

Our principal investment account at Charles Schwab, which is professionally managed by Birch Hill, had a total negative return of approximately 9.1% which included \$73,079 in dividends. The equity portion of the endowment declined 11.8% which compares favorably to the Standard & Poor's 500 index and the Russell 2000 index which declined 18.1% and 21.6% respectively. This resulted in an endowment balance at the end of 2022 of \$3.97 million. Our current investment return target remains a real return (inflation adjusted) of at least 4% annual average total growth. In parallel, our spending policy contemplates that annually we will use 4% of the annual three-year year-end average balance for operations. We made no draws on the endowment in 2021 or 2022.

### Capital Campaign-Final Report

As noted in the previous year's report, the cost of the Church's HVAC and fire suppression systems was funded on an interim basis by early contributions to the Capital Campaign and funds borrowed from Cambridge Trust. We also used funds from the endowment, directly and indirectly, to pay for approximately \$1,130,000 of planning and construction related costs.

In the first quarter of 2022 we were able to pay off our outstanding loan commitment to Cambridge Trust, ahead of schedule. All subsequent capital campaign funds received have been added back to the endowment. As of December 31, 2022, there were approximately \$247,000 of capital campaign pledges outstanding.

### 2023 Budget

The 2023 Budget plans for total revenues of \$1.33 million with a Nursery School occupancy rate to be at or very near capacity. At the end of December, Stewardship pledges for 2023 were approximately \$710,000 and efforts to increase stewardship are on-going. Should it be needed, the budgeted draw from our endowment

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# 2022 Annual Report

for annual operations will be approximately \$152,000 in 2023.

Some parts of the endowment are restricted and are most often targeting particular uses, either by the donors or by the pertinent church board. For example, in 2023, we once again expect to draw approximately \$22,000 from the J. David and Virginia Wimberly Fund for Music Ministry to help defray the annual compensation costs for our Director of Music. The spending from these restricted funds is consistent with prior years and will be in addition to the planned endowment draw previously mentioned. Consistent with past practice, we wish to maintain and hopefully grow the endowment to support the Church's annual operations on a continuing basis.

Total expenses are expected to increase in 2023 relative to actual spending in 2022, due primarily to an increase in personnel expenses which support our new settled minister and salary adjustments for all staff and clergy. For 2023, the UCC issued new salary guidelines for the clergy and progress towards those guidelines is embedded in the Human Resource expenditures for the 2023 fiscal year.

Partially offsetting these costs is a reduction in office and property expenditures which are expected to return to historical spending levels. In addition, we are reducing our annual giving to the SNEUCC by \$10,000 given the senior minister search is now complete.

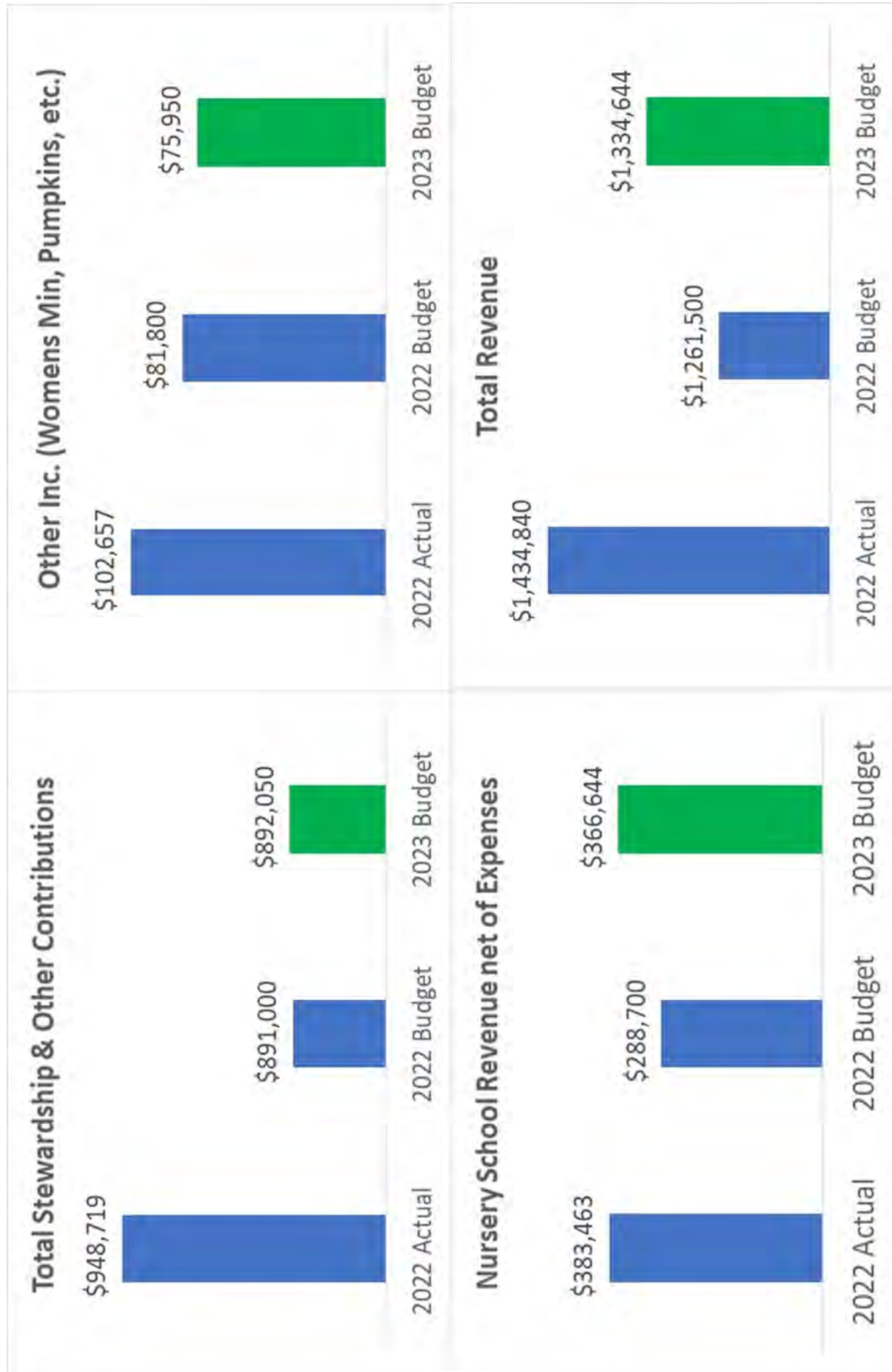
As a result of all of these factors, we expect to have a challenging but manageable operating deficit in 2023. Ongoing efforts to increase stewardship giving over the next few weeks will be a key to the success of this year's budget.

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

Many thanks to our finance staff, John Dooley and Jessica Bliss who have both been helpful throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Andy Wilson, Chair

# 2022 Annual Report





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