



One Symphony Circle, Buffalo, NY 14201-1213

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# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

*The mission of historic First Church is to bring diverse people of metropolitan Buffalo together to follow Jesus Christ through worshiping God, fostering spiritual growth and serving the community.*

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## **Agenda for the Annual Meetings Of the Congregation and the Corporation**

**February 25, 2024**

Moderator: Rev. Leslie Latham

Clerk of Session: Janet Hill

1. Call of the meeting. Declaration of quorum.
2. Opening Prayer  
Holy and Eternal One, in this time together help us to discern your will for this, your church. Allow us to use the resources you have placed in our hands wisely. Be with us as we consider the mission and ministry of First Church, and as we look forward to what your Spirit will inspire us to do in the future. We ask your blessings on the meeting on which we now embark, trusting in God's presence among us. Amen.
3. Statement of Agenda:  
To approve the minutes of the 2021 Annual Meeting and Congregational Meeting  
To elect Elders and Deacons for the Class of 2026  
To elect the Nominating Committee for 2024  
To hear the reports of boards, committees and groups  
To hear updates of the Transition Team and invite questions
4. Approval of Annual and Congregational Meeting minutes.
5. Election of Elders and Deacons for the Class of 2026
6. Election of Nominating Committee for 2024
7. Reports of boards, committees and groups - see pages 6-8
8. Adjournment of the meeting of the congregation
9. Reconvene for the meeting of the corporation
10. Moderator: Elder Don Houck, Vice President of the Corporate Board

11. Call of the meeting. Declaration of quorum.
12. Statement of Agenda
  - Approval of Annual Corporation minutes
  - Report of the Corporate Board
  - Report of the One Symphony Circle Board
  - Presentation of 2023 budget for reception
  - Report of Finances and Investments
  - Question and Answer period
  - Other business
13. Approval of Minutes of 2023 Annual Meeting of the Corporation
14. Report of the Corporate Board
15. Report of the One Symphony Circle Board
16. Presentation of the 2024 Budget—see page 11
17. Finance and Investment Report
18. Question and Answer period
19. Other business
20. Adjournment with prayer
21. Closing Prayer
  - Sheltering God, as we depart this place we dare pray that you will do for us and among us and through us what is needed for rebirth. Make us servants of your kingdom, through which all Creation is made new. Amen.

**-First Presbyterian Church**  
**Buffalo, New York**

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting**  
**of the Congregation and the Corporation**

**February 5, 2023**

**Moderators:** Rev. Leslie Latham and Elder Don Houck, CB Vice President  
**Clerk of Session:** Janet Hill

Rev. Leslie Latham convened the Annual Meeting at 11:35 A.M. The clerk declared a quorum. Rev. Latham opened with prayer. She stated the call of the meeting and read the agenda.

**M/S/C to approve the agenda.**

**M/S/C to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Congregation and the Corporation and to approve as written.**

Elder Mark Armesto, chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate for the 2025 Class of the Board of Deacons. The slate consisted of Olga Rico Armesto (2), Nikia Jenkins (1) and Lou Ann Luther Riegler (1). The floor was opened for nominations. Being none, the motion was made.

**M/S/C to authorize the Clerk to cast a single, unanimous ballot to elect Olga Rico Armesto (2), Nikia Jenkins (1) and Lou Ann Luther Riegler (1) to the Board of Deacons, Class of 2025.**

There was a one-year vacancy on the Board of Deacons, Class of 2023. The floor was opened for nominations. Mark Armesto was nominated.

**M/S/C to close nominations.**

**M/S/C to elect Mark Armesto to the Board of Deacons, Class of 2023.**

The slate of Elders was presented by Elder Armesto. The slate consisted of Pat Harmon (1), Pat Frey (1), and Suzanne Pilon (1). The floor was opened for nominations. Being none, the motion was made.

**M/S/C to authorize the Clerk to cast a single, unanimous ballot to elect Pat Harmon (1), Pat Frey (1), and Suzanne Pilon (1) to Session, Class of 2025.**

There was a round of applause for the outgoing Elders and Deacons.

Elder Armesto presented the members of the Corporate Board for reelection: James Gardner, President; Don Houck, Vice President; Mark Armesto, Treasurer, and Janet Hill, Secretary.

**M/S/C to reelect the Corporate Board: James Gardner, President; Don Houck, Vice President; Mark Armesto, Treasurer, and Janet Hill, Secretary.**

The election of the 2023 Nominating Committee was next on the agenda. Elder Armesto stated that the committee would consist of one Elder, one Deacon, and at-large members of the congregation. Nominated from the floor was Jonathan Cox.

**M/S/C to elect Jonathan Cox to the 2023 Nominating Committee.**

Elders and Deacons will elect their members to the Nominating Committee at their respective meetings.

Rev. Latham recognized the 50 Year Members of First Church.

**Reports of Boards, Committees, and Groups.**

**One Symphony Circle Board**

**OSC President Cox**

Jonathan Cox introduced himself as a member of First Church and President of the One Symphony Circle Board. He stated that the mission of the OSC Board was to help with the restoration of the church building. In the past they have held several smaller fund raisers.

Two new members have joined the board this year: Don Hart from Kleinhans Music and Hal Meisburger, a local architect. Dr. David Bond from First Church has been made a voting member.

A new carillon was recently installed in the tower, now that it has been stabilized. It was donated by a local family.

Thanks to the great work by Senator Chuck Schumer and Representative Brian Higgins, OSC received a 1.5-million-dollar federal grant for the continued restoration of the First Church building. The board is waiting for some answers about the grant before the funds can be utilized.

**Membership**

**Elder Hill**

First Church membership on January 1, 2022 was 107. Through the year that number was decreased by the deaths of three members and increased by the addition of one member. Current membership stands at 105.

**Prayer Shawl Ministry**

Rev. Latham expressed her gratitude for the mission of the prayer shawl ministry. They presented seven prayer shawls this year, bringing the total to 325. They had also made 95 pocket prayer shawls for service members in 2012 to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of First Church.

**Transition Team**

**Elder Armesto**

Elder Armesto reported that the team's focus this year was to continue to move the church family forward after Rev. Dr.

Hughes's retirement. After interviewing multiple pastors, the team chose Rev. Latham for Session's approval, which was granted. Recently her contract was extended through the end of 2023.

The floor was opened for questions and/or comments. There were none. There was a motion to adjourn the meeting of the congregation.

**M/S/C to adjourn the Meeting of the Congregation.**

**M/S/C to open the Meeting of the Congregation.**

The meeting of the congregation opened with Vice President Don Houck as moderator. The clerk declared a quorum.

### **Budget**

The 2023 Budget had been approved by Session. Elder Houck went over some highlights. He noted that rental income was dramatically reduced due to two major tenants moving out. First Church has been working with a realtor to find new tenants. Pledge income was less than anticipated. The amount of funds in the Money Market Transfers line was what was made available in the budget but is not always taken. The 2022 Budget showed an annual deficit of \$92,097. However, the final check from the state for tower restoration eliminated the deficit. It was reported as income in a prior year.

### **Investments**

The investments showed a loss of \$122,919 during 2022. The Investment Committee felt lucky that the loss was not greater given the condition of the market. They are fortunate to be working with an expert who manages the funds.

The floor was opened for questions and/or other business. Being none, there was a motion to close the meeting of the Corporation.

**M/S/C to adjourn the Meeting of the Corporation.**

The corporation meeting adjourned at 12:03 P.M.

There was a motion to open the Congregational meeting

**M/S/C to resume the Congregational meeting.**

The Meeting of the Congregation resumed at 12:03 P.M.

**M/S/C to adjourn the Annual Meeting of the Congregation and the Corporation.**

The Annual Meeting adjourned with prayer at 12:04 P.M.

Janet Hill

Respectfully submitted,

Clerk of Session

## **Pastor's Annual Report**

We have completed our first full year of ministry together! We've had a year bookended by disasters—the Christmas 22 blizzard and the great flood of 24. Nevertheless, we persist.

Worship is always at the center of all we do, including the celebration of sacraments. We've tried some new things. I found the Sanctified Art curriculum and loved it for Lent-Easter. We had prayer cards, poetry, and challenging artwork that we displayed, along with the artists' statements.

What a joy to celebrate World Communion Sunday with the El Shaddai congregation! We continue to look for more opportunities to worship and serve together.

We held a Blue Christmas service especially geared towards those who mourn. It is always one of the most meaningful worship services we have.

The Deacons ramped up, and have been active in reaching out to our folks unable to come to worship, with cards, fruit baskets, and home communion to folks who hadn't had communion in a very long time. Thank you, Deacons!

This has been an intentional year for visitation for me as well. I've reached out to those homebound folks in person, by phone call, and even texts.

Last winter I took a class in Family Systems, and another called Resetting the Table, all aimed at improving the way we live and converse WITH one another through grace and compassion.

VOICE Buffalo and their efforts to work toward a more equitable city remains one my foci. The congregation was amazingly grace-filled as I performed my civic duty as a grand juror. With any luck I'll be retired before I need to serve again...

On a personal note, my heart swells with gratitude as I think of your kindness when my son was hit by a car last February. You supported me in every conceivable way, and I am humbled.

Peace and Joy,

*Leslie*

Rev. Leslie Latham

## Celebration of 50-Year Members

Mrs. Emily Wettlaufer	03-26-1937
Mr. Alan R. McCausland	04-01-1945
Mr. Henry M. Porter	06-19-1949
Mr. James M. Wadsworth	04-06-1952
Mr. Robert H. Miller	06-03-1956
Mrs. Nancy R. H. Barry	03-18-1956
Mr. Hilary P. Bradford	10-04-1957
Mr. Willard A Genrich, Jr.	03-31-1961
Mr. Bruce Marks	03-31-1961
Mrs. Joan R. Close	10-01-1961
Mrs. Elizabeth S. Kamke	06-10-1962
Mrs. Gladys Gibbon	12-01-1963
Mr. Donald L. Houck, Jr.	06-03-1965
Mrs. Andrea Abels	05-29-1966
Mr. John Burke Armesto, Jr.	05-29-1966
Mr. Mark Earle Armesto	05-29-1966
Mr. Gregg R. Borland	02-12-1967
Ms. Christine Armesto	06-02-1968
Mr. Denis Wettlaufer	06-02-1968

## Report of Membership Changes

<b>Membership January 2023</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>New Member</b>	
Marsha Baker	06-25-2023
<b>Member Deaths</b>	
Margaret (Peggy) Laffler	03-24-2023
Robert Miller	10-12-2023
Harriet Burney	12-14-2023
 <b>Inactive Members Removed</b>	 <b>22</b>
 <b>Membership December 2023</b>	 <b>81</b>

## Report of the Clerk of Session

Session meetings and Congregational meetings in 2023 were moderated by Rev. Leslie Latham. Session meetings were held monthly, except for a summer hiatus in July and a winter hiatus in December. The Annual Meeting of the Congregation on February 5 was moderated by Rev. Latham and the Annual Meeting of the Corporation was moderated by Corporate Board Vice President Don Houck. All Session, Corporate Board, and Congregational meetings were opened and closed with prayer. All minutes, baptisms, and membership changes were approved.

- The following actions were taken by Session and the Congregation in 2023.
- Approved the request of One Symphony Circle to serve champagne on December 20 at the reception of the new carillon that had been donated by a local family.
  - Agreed to allow Pastor Alexis and the El Shaddai congregation to use First Church chapel on Sunday afternoons at 3:00 until repairs are finished on their building.
  - Approved the baptism of Robert Rand Amo, son of Lauren (active member) and Robert Amo, on April 30.
  - Scheduled the Annual Meeting for February 5, 2023.
  - Authorized the Clerk to cast a single, unanimous ballot to elect Olga Rico Armesto (2), Nikia Jenkins (1), and Lou Ann Luther Riegle (1) to the Board of Deacons, Class of 2025.
  - Elected Mark Armesto (1) to the Board of Deacons, Class of 2023.
  - Authorized the Clerk to cast a single, unanimous ballot to elect Pat Harmon (1), Pat Frey (1), and Suzanne Pilon (1) to Session, Class of 2025.
  - Reelected the Corporate Board: James Gardner, President; Don Houck, Vice President; Mark Armesto, Treasurer, and Janet Hill, Secretary.
  - Elected Jonathan Cox to the 2023 Nominating Committee.
  - Received and approved the 2022 Statistical Report.
  - Received the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Congregation and the Corporation.
  - Called a special meeting of Session on January 30 at 6:00 P.M. to consider the extension of the contract with Rev. Leslie Latham.
  - Approved the One Great Hour of Sharing collection on February 22-April 9.
  - Voted (unanimous) to extend the contract of Rev. Leslie Latham through December 30, 2023 on the same terms as her terms of call.
  - Confirmed the email vote to cancel service on February 22, Ash Wednesday, due to weather conditions.
  - Voted to (1) bifurcate the Administration Committee into Personnel and Lands & Buildings and (2) to delegate direct oversight of the Lands & Buildings, Finance, Investments, Personnel, the bookkeeper and the facilities to the Corporate Board.
  - Elected Janet Hill as the Session member to the Nominating Committee.
  - Approved the request to serve wine at the annual dinner of the AGO on Sunday, May 21.
  - Approved the request that One Symphony Circle/Explore Buffalo hold chicken BBQ fundraisers on June 6 and October 17 at a charge of \$15.00 per dinner with profits to be split equally.
  - Approved the request that First Church, in conjunction with Voice Buffalo, host a community gathering called "What Our Faith Demands of Us."
  - Received Marsha Baker as a new member on Sunday, June 25.

Agreed to donate \$100 to Camp Duffield in response to their funding request.  
Entered into a contract with Park Place Installations for roughly \$5,500 for the purchase of a video system.  
Agreed to hold an event focused on planning for the final passage to be held in late September or early October with details forthcoming.  
Approved the request to host *Resetting the Table* on October 17-18 from 6:00-8:00 P.M. at a cost of \$350.  
Approved the request of One Symphony Circle to add Cheryl Lyles as a new member to the OSC Board.  
Approved the request of Rev. Leslie Latham to take a sabbatical from January 10 to February 7, 2024, during which she would travel to Turkey, across Canada by rail, and a dip into the Pacific Northwest if the way be clear.  
Approved a one-year contract extension for Rev. Leslie Latham through December 31, 2024, using updated salary and compensation numbers from Presbytery when available.  
Approved the request of El Shaddai Buffalo to use the sanctuary on Saturday evening, August 26 and Sunday afternoon, August 27 to celebrate their five years here.  
Approved the collection of the Peace & Global Witness Offering on October 29.  
Approved the collection of the Christmas Joy Offering on Christmas Eve.  
Approved the 2024 budget.  
Agreed to not hold a Session meeting in December.



## **Christian Education**

The Christian Education committee continues to focus on developing faith and knowledge in all our members and friends.

Our greatest challenge is the absence of children to enjoy Sunday school programming. But we have grown to five members. One day we may have them all in the classroom at once, which I think they will enjoy as much as I do.

We are learning faith songs and fingerplays. When the weather is nice we visit the chickens in our back garden and enjoy the sunshine. Kurt Froese, Director of Family Ministries, provides a Children's Message every Sunday. It is certainly enjoyed by adults. Kurt has preached on occasion. He offered several adult education classes that were well received in the last year. He will continue classes in the coming year and coordinate courses offered by other members.

We are still organizing and cleaning out the dust bunnies in our three classrooms above the Historical Hall. Who knew we have so many craft things! Gay-She helped over the summer, which gave us a boost. By this summer, the rooms will be ready for repair and painting. The renovation and rejuvenation will help kick start our programs for the future.

Kurt and I discussed a variety of interesting and entertaining activities for families and members for 2024. We will offer several faith development opportunities as well. Won't join us to discuss these ideas further and share yours as well?

With Blessings to all,  
Maria Patrick-Roberts

## **Building repairs completed or started in 2023**

- Remedial repairs to the slate roof on Wadsworth Street to counter the leaks over the organ
- Repaired drain issues in the second floor men's room of Allen Hall.
- Continued regular repairs & maintenance to the gutters and downspouts

## **Church Life**

Thank you to all who hosted coffee hours last year. A big round of applause to the deacons for taking on the organization of this social time. Special thanks to Gail and Jim McKeel and Ilsa Cooper for their continued efforts in this area. The deacons will be glad to have you host or help with set up and cleanup for coffee hours – sign up in the Narthex!

Church Life hosted 2 Weidner Chicken BBQs this year in cooperation with Explore Buffalo and One Symphony Circle, raising about \$1500 for each group.

Some other activities were attending a Bisons baseball game, seeing Lucas Lloyd perform in a Dinner Theatre play, decorating the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas and a Christmas Cookie Exchange at Rev. Latham's home. Thank you to all who hosted or helped organize these activities. The committee organized and hosted memorial service receptions also.

We look forward to a variety of activities for this next year – an Eclipse party, Shakespeare in Delaware Park, picnics, game nights. Join us and get to know your church family better!

Respectfully submitted,  
Jean Hess

## **Worship and Music Committee**

Thank you to Rev. Latham, Dr. Bond, the Choir, Bell Choir and Pat Harmon for maintaining our standard of worship and music this past year. Most of the planning and execution has fallen on their capable shoulders and we are grateful for the continuity it gives us.

Thank you also to those who volunteered as liturgists. Please continue to take part in worship in this simple way. Contact Jean Hess to volunteer. A special thank you to Maria, Madeline, Ilsa, Mary and Marsha for serving as the Communion Committee. Other helpers are always welcome to help with set up and clean up and to change the seasonal decorations of the sanctuary. Contact Maria Roberts to help

Respectfully submitted,  
Jean Hess

## **Transition Team**

The Transition Team continues to support the work of Rev. Latham, Dr. Bond and other staff members. Rev. Latham's contract was extended through December 2024. She was approved for a presbytery supported mini sabbatical for January 2024. Plans are in the works for spring of 2024 activities.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jean Hess

## First Presbyterian Church Financial Report

<b>INCOME</b>	<b><u>2023 Budget</u></b>	<b><u>2023 Actual</u></b>	<b><u>2024 Budget</u></b>
Total Pledged Receipts	140,000	123,118	123,840
Total Plate Receipts Identified	8,000	18,800	8,000
Total Plate Receipts Anonymous	0	1,909	1,700
Total Rental Revenue	24,480	28,817	24,480
Total Fund Transfers	28,260	13,610	28,260
Per capita	3,816	152	3,816
Building Use	2,000	1,850	2,000
Bequest Dividend checks	5,500	5,692	5,500
Investment Dividend	193,500	220,000	195,000
Other Revenue	<u>1,000</u>	<u>14,181</u>	<u>1,000</u>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>406,556</b>	<b>428,129</b>	<b>393,596</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Personnel	294,833	285,453	272,504
Administration	28,400	30,061	27,800
Land & Buildings	122,500	135,286	123,000
Mission	12,187	13,162	12,187
Program	<u>8,360</u>	<u>6,230</u>	<u>8,360</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>466,280</b>	<b>470,192</b>	<b>443,851</b>
<b>Balance to Budget</b>	<b>-59,724</b>	<b>-42,063</b>	<b>-50,255</b>
<b>FUNDS</b>	<b><u>01.01.2023</u></b>	<b><u>income</u></b>	<b><u>expense</u></b>
			<b><u>12.31.2023</u></b>
Lyon Food Fund	5,507	4,943	5,037
Camp Tea Fund	1,325	0	0
Haskin Music Fund	3,574	7,557	1,000
Smiley Mission Fund	3,325	1,579	360
Memorial Fund	5,857	0	1,136
Youth Fund	1,546	0	0
Neuschel Flower	1,593	0	0
Wadsworth Flower	106	0	0
Olmsted Organ	31,307	2,940	11,200
Pedler Fund	639	1888	0
Minister's Fund	649	283	0
<b>INVESTMENTS</b>	<b><u>01.01.2023</u></b>		<b><u>12.31.2023</u></b>
	2,657,036		2,560,587

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OFFICERS

### SESSION BY CLASS AND TERM

#### **Class of 2023**

Janet Hill (2)  
Quinton Meyer (1)  
Tim Hess (1)  
Kailee Van Brunt (1)

#### **Class of 2024**

James Gardner (2)  
Jean Hess (2)  
Maria Patrick-Roberts (1)

#### **Class of 2025**

Pat Frey (1)  
Pat Harmon (1)  
Suzanne Pilon (1)

### OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION

James Gardner, President  
Don Houck Vice President  
Mark Armesto, Treasurer  
Janet Hill, Secretary

### Transition Team

Mark Armesto  
David Bond  
Ilsa Cooper  
Jean Hess  
John Long  
Eli Van Brunt

### BOARD OF DEACONS BY CLASS AND TERM

#### **Class of 2023**

Ilsa Cooper (1)  
Suzanne Pilon (2)  
Eli Van Brunt (1)

#### **Class of 2024**

Christina Banas (1)  
Gail McKeel (1)  
Jim McKeel (2)  
Madeline Mason-Brandon (1)

#### **Class of 2025**

Olga Rico-Armesto (2)  
Niki Jenkins (1)  
LouAnn Riegler (1)



## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF

### **The Reverend Leslie Latham**

*Pastor, Head of Staff*  
[Revleslie@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:Revleslie@firstchurchbuffalo.org)

### **The Reverend John Long, D.D.,**

*Parish Associate for Community Outreach*  
[johnrlong17@verizon.net](mailto:johnrlong17@verizon.net)

### **Dr. David Bond, Organist/Choirmaster,**

*Bookkeeper, Facilities Manager*  
[DBond@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:DBond@firstchurchbuffalo.org)  
Voicemail extension 204

### **Cory Connell, Maintenance Coordinator**

[Connelljamescory@gmail.com](mailto:Connelljamescory@gmail.com)  
Voicemail extension 201

### **Kurt Froese, Director of Family Ministries**

[KFroese@firstchurchbuffalo.org](mailto:KFroese@firstchurchbuffalo.org)  
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