

KEENE VALLEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT – 2023

JANUARY 21, 2024

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

TOLLING OF THE BELL

DECLARATION OF QUORUM

MINUTES FROM 10/9/22 ANNUAL MEETING

CONGREGATIONAL BUSINESS

- Updated Bylaws
- AMS Update and Allocation for the Handicapped Parking Lot
- 2024 Budget
- Election of Officers and Council Members
 - Moderator – Debora Rice
 - Vice Moderator – Fritz Sabbow
 - Treasurer – Nancy McArthur
 - Clerk - Deborah Mitchell
 - Members-at-Large – Susie Allen, Elizabeth Davidson Derr, Robert Rokosz, Dre Roebuck
 - UCC Delegates – Shawn Lamarche, Annie Scavo

CHARGING THE NEW OFFICERS AND COUNCIL

CELEBRATIONS

ACCEPTANCE OF ANNUAL REPORTS

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

CLOSING PRAYER

MINISTER'S GREETING

I will never forget the first time I heard of Keene Valley Congregational Church. It was described to me as, “a little gem of a church up in the Adirondacks.” Over the years, and in many different ways, I’ve come to understand how true this statement was, and continues to be.

As we gather for our congregation’s Annual Meeting, a time to celebrate the life of our church and conduct needed business, I pray that you may take some time to read this report in its entirety. Throughout this report you will read about the many ways God has invited us to experience the Divine Presence in our individual journeys of spirit, and as a community of faith. You will also read about the ways our members and friends have responded to this call with open hearts and minds. We are a vibrant church, excited about the future, committed to our mission, faithful to the legacy we have been gifted by those who have come before us, and working for a future we can pass to the next generation with hope.

I am especially thankful to God for weaving our paths of spirit together, through the times of joy, and the times of tears. It is our collective presence that really makes Keene Valley Congregational Church, “a little gem of a church up in the Adirondacks.”

Offered with God’s love,
Pastor John

MINUTES FROM THE 2022 ANNUAL MEETING

KEENE VALLEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ANNUAL MEETING OCTOBER 9, 2022

PRESENT: In Person:

Via Zoom: Those attendees on-line are unable to vote but can contribute.

WELCOME AND CALLING THE MEETING TO ORDER: Moderator Debby Rice called the meeting to 11:09 AM and welcomed the congregation and those on-line to the Annual Meeting. Debby invited all participants to share their ideas and concerns during this Meeting.

OPENING READING: Deborah Mitchell offered the following opening reading: Pause – For just a second and be grateful. Even if life isn’t perfect. Let’s be thankful. For the life we get to live, the stories we get to tell, and the adventure we get to experience. Always pray, to have eyes that see the best in people, a mind that forgets the bad, a heart that forgives the worst, and a soul that radiates kindness. Amen.

TOLLING OF THE BELL: Frits Sabbow presented the Tolling of the Bell and in memory of those in our community who have passed away read the following names: Necrology – Richard Austin, Mae Heald, Augusta Prince, Charles Smith, and Betsy Whitman.

DECLARATION OF QUORUM: Debby Rice conducted roll call. Members of KVCC were asked to raise their hand, and a quorum was declared.

OFFERING OF THE MINUTES FROM THE 2021 ANNUAL MEETING: Dre Roebuck made a motion to accept the 2021 Annual Meeting Minutes. Elizabeth Davidson Derr seconded the motion. A discussion was held, and the motion passed.

BUSINESS:

OFFERING OF THE 2022 OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS: Debby Rice called for a vote for the 2022 Officers and Council Members. They are Debby Rice (Moderator), Dre Roebuck (Vice Moderator), Nancy McArthur (treasurer), Deborah Mitchell (Clerk), and serving as Members at Large are Susie Allen, Jimm Collin, Paul Osenbaugh, Frits Sabbow. Our UCC Annual Delegates are Shawn Lamarche with Anne Hurd as the alternate. Paul Martin made a motion to accept the slate of officers and Council members for 2023. Paul Osenbaugh seconded the motion. A discussion was held, and the motion was passed.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION Pam Gothner made special recognition of Paul Osenbaugh for his significant efforts to

improve the grounds here at KVCC. His dedication was unexpected, and he worked hard at helping us make progress on numerous projects. Thank you Paul. Also recognized was Barb Merle Smith for her community outreach efforts and action. She was able to coordinate a hygiene drive for flood victims. Finally, Nancy McArthur was recognized for the money raised at a well-attended Ukrainian dinner. The Council are grateful for their commitment and dedication.

OFFERING OF THE 2021 ANNUAL REPORTS: Skipped

TREASURER REPORT AND REVIEW ON 2023 DRAFT BUDGET: Nancy McArthur provided us with a copy of the proposed 2023 budget and provided answers to questions fielded by those in attendance. Shawn Lamarche made a motion to accept the 2023 Budget as presented. Henrietta Jordan seconded the motion. A discussion was held, and the motion passed.

ANNUAL BAZAAR 2022 DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS: BAZAAR – SHOULD WE HAVE IT?

Dre Roebuck provided an overview of this year's Annual Bazaar. Dre sought volunteers for the jewelry sale now that Barbara Merle Smith has moved away. Both Charlotte Lichtenberg and Lisa Nason volunteered to take over this part of the Annual Bazaar. Elizabeth Davidson Derr made a motion that we have a church bazaar in 2023. Pam Gothner seconded the motion. A discussion was made, and the motion was passed.

NEW BUSINESS:

Personnel Committee: Fritz Sabbow provided an overview of the progress the Personnel Committee is making on the development of an evaluation tool for Pastor John. Members of the Personnel Committee are Fritz Sabbow, Larry Shipp, Linda Bogardus and Deborah Mitchell. Pastor John has been serving at the church for a few years now and has requested an evaluation of his work. The evaluation tool is in its final development and will then be reviewed by the Council.

Other:

Lisa Norton suggested we have a Christmas tree decorating party with children as she has fond memories of doing this herself as a child at KVCC.

Dre Roebuck let us know there will be a building workday (cleaning up garage and basement) on November 19th. Details to follow.

Elizabeth Davidson Derr recommended we designate someone to head up the coordination of coffee hour as we are struggling to find people to sign up for this important time at KVCC.

Debby Rice adjourned the meeting at noon.

Respectfully submitted,
Deborah Mitchell, Clerk

MINISTER'S REPORT

Although I have connection to all of the things we are doing at KVCC, I will just highlight a few of them. Many of the other projects and initiatives I am involved with have been covered in the Committee and functional reports.

Worship and Spiritual Development

- It is my joy and privilege to be the spiritual leader of our church community. Sunday morning worship, which I consider to be the heartbeat of our church, continues to nourish our community through prayer, reflection, music, spiritual exploration and community.
- I also deep grateful to lead our special services throughout the year, including our Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and St. Francis Day services.
- We continue to celebrate God's gift of Creation through the celebration of our equinox and solstice services, which draw members from our wider community that we often never see on Sunday morning. I am thankful for the way that these gatherings can provide community and spiritual nourishment to those

who may not see themselves as 'church people'. Thanks also to the committed group that means throughout the year to help bring these celebrations to life.

- We had another successful Summer Music Program, inviting musicians from around our region, and beyond, to share their gift of music with us. Special thanks to Nancy Emrich and Bill Serjak for leading the program.
- I also continue to lead weekly worship at the Neighborhood House. It is very rewarding to pray, sing, and explore our faith stories with the residents. Members of the Neighborhood House have been attending Sunday morning worship at KVCC.
- Friday morning prayer group meets weekly in the VSR, sharing prayers, concerns, and joys of the community. Thanks to the entire group for their ongoing offering of prayer in support of our church, our community, our nation, and the entire world.
- The Centering Prayer Group (CPG) continues to meet faithfully every morning @ 7 AM via Zoom.

Memorial Services and Weddings

- KVCC serves our wider community by offering to help mark life's most important transitions, esp. weddings and memorials. Over this past year we supported both members of our church, and neighbors throughout our region, and beyond. KVCC continues to be seen as place of comfort and celebration, a place whose function simply can't be replaced for many.

Pastoral Support

- I provide ongoing pastoral support to the church community via Zoom, telephone, in-person meetings, and email. To be invited to journey with a person in both their most challenging and joyful moments is a sacred responsibility that I cherish.

Book Discussion Group – Tuesday Nights

- I led groups in reading *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul* by John Philip Newell and *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Community Support

- Through the administration of the Pastor's Discretionary fund our church continues to provide robust emergency support for our members, friends and neighbors.

Serving the Wider Denomination

- Currently serving a second 3-year term on the UCC NY Board of Directors. My term ends in May.
- Member of the North Country Association's Committee on Ministry.

Web Site

- Working with Jimm Collin on the launch of a new website. A beta version of the site is to be available at the end of January/beginning of February.

Bequest Discernment Group

- Leading the group discerning how to apply the Annette Merle-Smith bequest. Interviews with the wider community completed. Group is currently creating a report for the Council with suggestions.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

This year's Nominating Committee was composed of Ingrid Carman, Liz Jaques, and John Sampson. Thanks to the Committee for all of their discernment and work in pulling together the proposed slate of church council members for 2024:

Moderator – Debby Rice

Vice Moderator – Fritz Sabbow

Treasurer – Nance McArthur

Clerk - Deborah Mitchell

Members at Large (4 positions) –Susie Allen, Elizabeth Davidson, Dre Roebuck, Robert Rokosz.

UCC Conference Delegate – Shawn Lamarch

UCC Conference Delegate - Alternate – Annie Scavo

REPORT OF THE ESSEX ASSOCIATION OF THE NEW YORK CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The big news for the Essex Association in 2023 was...that it no longer exists! After many years of reflection, prayerful discernment, and conversation the Essex Association agreed to merge with the Black River/Saint Lawrence Association to form the new North Country Association. This merger was confirmed by both associations at their annual meetings, and then by the NY Conference at its annual meeting. It became effective on October 1.

The Essex and Black River/Saint Lawrence Associations pursued this merger as a way to leverage existing resources in more efficient and productive ways to better serve UCC churches located throughout New York State's north country region. Members of KVCC are supporting the new association by serving on its boards, in leadership positions, and through our donations. Let us all pray that the North Country Association is successful in all it does.

MODERATOR'S REPORT

We opened the year by joyfully welcoming back Pastor John Sampson from Sabbatical. John and Susie Allen led a Council retreat where we dreamed of a future church in a not-so-distant future.

We hope that as we read this report we will pause and celebrate some of the many ways we are a caring spiritual community that is embracing and serving our community while deepening our spiritual interior life.

A few of our many highlights:

- Celtic global leader, John Phillip Newell, led a summer retreat where we were awakened to his message of God's unqualified love.
- Two refugees are sponsored and supported by our church's WelcomeCorps group as they become a beloved integral part of our lives.
- Active local community leader transfers Keene food pantry program to our Church (now called the Keene Food Mission) so we can continue this much needed ministry.
- A group of dynamic regional leaders from the local synagogues and the Combat Antisemitism Movement tell us their heartfelt history, stories and dreams.

The day-to-day work goes on and this report reflects those highlights as well. We take our responsibilities seriously while experiencing enormous joy in smaller groups while singing and ringing bells, maintaining our

historic building, growing a community garden, arranging flowers for the service, planning the Sunday worship services and solstice celebrations, meditating every single morning, reading great books together, actively showing up for Pride days in Saranac Lake and Plattsburgh, stewarding church finances, volunteering in our Annual Bazaar, paddling in silent meditation on a beautiful summer day, and so much more.

I can't wait to experience the coming year in service together.

Respectfully submitted,
Debby Rice, Moderator

JOHN PHILIP NEWELL EVENT

Planning team members:

Susie Allen, Elizabeth Davidson, Lorraine Duvall, Martha Gallagher, Karen Glass, Naomi Kelly (Old Forge), Debby Rice, John Sampson, Bernie and Ethel Webb, Naj Wikoff;
Nancy McArthur and Liz Jaques provided ongoing support

Event Volunteers

Linda Bogardus, Mary Brophy-Moore (Old Forge), Pam Gothner, Betsey Serjak, Jewels Taylor-Wilde, Adam Wilson (friend of Lorraine's)

Quick Recap

On behalf of the Faith and Issues book group, I made a proposal to Council in late January 2023. The proposal identified Celtic teacher, John Philip Newell, outlined the history of the desire of Faith and Issues group to bring him to Keene Valley, and asked Council for their endorsement of our plan to bring Newell to KVCC in July 2023.

In the following months, a planning team came together and met every-other-week from the beginning of February through the second week of July. The team reviewed and selected a registration website, which was prepared by Martha Gallagher. Karen Glass wrote 2 grant proposals – ECAC and The Genesis Fund (UCC) - and we received both grants! Naomi Kelly, our collaborative partner from Old Forge, arranged for 3 more grants – from her organization, Weaving Home; from the church she serves – Niccolls Memorial Presbyterian Church; and from the Presbytery of Utica. The total from grants was \$6950, just \$50 less than Newell's fee of \$7000! Naj and Lorraine wrote articles for local publications highlighting Newell's message and our event. We publicized on social media and with posters around the region.

We offered registration fees at 3 levels:

1. \$45 for those who need financial assistance (12% paid at this rate)
2. \$75 full registration fee (73% paid at this rate)
3. \$100 scholarship fee for those able to provide financial assistance (15% paid at this rate)

Debby Rice and Dan Mason provided housing for John Philip Newell and Cami Twilling (Director of Earth and Soul).

John Philip Newell and Cami Twilling led 3 events while here:

1. A talk and book signing on Friday, July 14
2. A morning retreat on Saturday, July 15
3. An evening presentation on Saturday, July 15, of the film, "Hebridean Treasure"

Thanks to a robust registration and the grant income, we were able to provide a catered lunch for all who attended the Saturday morning retreat. Elie Wadsworth, of Ausable Inn, prepared and set-up the buffet lunch at the Keene Valley Fire Hall. The Keene Valley Fire Department set-up and put away the tables. The Fire Hall was full to capacity with a buzz of people in conversation.

The Planning Team met 2 weeks after the event to review and reflect on the experience. By all accounts, this event was a strong and fulfilling success. Over 80 people attended the events. We ended up in the black and will split the remaining proceeds 50/50 with our partner, Naomi Kelly. John Philip Newell's clear, warm, engaging, sometimes humorous presence, and his expansive message generated deep questions, lasting conversation and inspiration, and expanded our reach into the wider community. We had registrants from as far away as Ohio and Georgia. The Planning Team has begun to think about who we might bring next to Keene Valley. Who else will help us expand our vision and understanding of sacred presence, inspire our action in the world, widen our spiritual community?

To close this report, I'm including a portion of an email Bernie and Ethel received from a friend (someone familiar with KVCC) who is in Michigan and was unable to attend the event. She watched the recording of John Philip Newell's talk on Friday, July 14 (there were over 115 views of the event recording):

I've also been wanting to write to thank you, and please pass on to others responsible, for sharing the opening night of the retreat with us far-away-ones. I was very moved by it. What a beautiful man. It's one thing to know and to have wisdom. It's a whole other level to be an embodiment of that knowledge as he is. I can imagine how transformative the whole weekend must have been and how your already wonderful place could become a true utopia as enough of you continue to live in and grow that light and love. I'm serious, I really do envision it and I'm definitely going to have to retire there one day.

FLOWER COMMITTEE

Generally speaking, we are using fewer real flowers again this year. Exceptions to this statement include: Christmas poinsettias and Easter flowers that are purchased. and available after the service to take home with or without a donation to the church flower fund.

The volunteer members of this group are: Alana Both, Ingrid Carmen, Susy Doolittle, and Charlotte Lichtenberg, plus Pastor John Sampson and other community members. All are working together to enhance the beauty of the sanctuary. Sometimes arrangements include the use of house plants and other natural plants found in fields, gardens or meadows.

The new flower schedule for February - May is posted on the church bulletin board near the coffee hour sign-up sheets. Ingrid is again away January - March so volunteers could fill Ingrid's absences one or more times.

Community members are encouraged to let us know about a memorial or any special remembrance they would like to sponsor. There is a flower chart to fill in near the flower sign-up sheets. Any group member can answer questions concerning these special requests.

We do continue to help each other when a member of the group is sick or away. We welcome anyone who would enjoy this kind of creative task to volunteer as a substitute. Arrangements from others are always welcome and appreciated. Anyone in our group would be happy to try to answer your questions!

REPORT OF THE CHAPLAIN AT LARGE

This year has been a year of transition for me since I did not have a position since Moriah Shock closed. I was able to do the protestant service at KVNH when Pastor John was on sabbatical. I enjoy that congregation very much.

I was also able to do pastoral care without having office hours at the church, largely by phone. I am still working on my limitations of not being able to drive at night.

I appreciate being able to be part of zoom church with its own little "coffee hour"

I have been a Hospice Volunteer since the fall of 1994. I still participate by phone and zoom meetings especially for bereavement.

"God is love." 1 John 4: 16

Rev. Jenifer Hale Deming

REPORT OF THE MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

I collaborated with John Sampson to create a site/day-specific ceremonial object for use on Good Friday. A combination of old and new, we brought in the Christ figure from the Italian roadside shrine given to the church by Andy Derr's uncle and (temporarily) hung it upon a new, simple oaken Tau cross that I fashioned for the observation of this holy remembrance. This crucifix was then installed upon the big table in the sanctuary's altar, replacing the usual rustic cross that hangs upon the wall behind the table most days of the year. This configuration was/is meant to be observed only of Good Friday, as a visual focus for contemplation of the many meanings of Christ's crucifixion.

Throughout the year I have made an effort to greet anyone in Church that is 'new' to me, and perhaps new to KVCC, in order to ensure they feel as welcome and as 'seen' as possible. And I've tried to follow up with those folks when they return to us to enhance their connection to our community.

Paul Osenbaugh

WORSHIP COMMITTEE

During John's sabbatical, the committee met once, in October 2022, to check how the worship services were going. Naj was commended for his major role in providing "new voices" speakers and/or music and readings each week. Susie Allen and Laurin McArthur took over the leadership for Advent and Christmas Eve. Their contributions were very positively received, as were the services for the fall equinox and winter solstice.

Topics discussed during the year include:

- Making the lighting of a peace candle part of Sunday services.
- How we carry out the ritual of communion. Inspired by his experience in Cambridge, John tried a new, more interactive communion in the Van Sant room. Feedback from congregants led him to resume our traditional method.
- The imagery of the cross, and whether we might instead emphasize earlier parts of Jesus' life and teachings.
- The use of paper bulletins. Various possibilities for lessening our dependence on weekly paper bulletins were tried and discussed.

- The time of prayers from the community. Some have expressed impatience with occasional lengthy or inappropriate prayers, but John is fully committed to having prayers said by people in their own words, in their own ways.
- The purpose and future of the Worship Committee, including its name. The resignation of a longtime committee member, along with dwindling attendance at meetings, led to discussions about what the committee does or could do, and how we might attract more members.

Submitted by Linda Bogardus

MUSIC REPORT

MUSIC DIRECTOR-Rob Hastings

The most significant thing to happen this year was the tragic accident Lynn DeWalt had on his motorcycle. He was cut off by a turning car and was thrown from his bike. Luckily, there was a rapid response from an officer nearby that saved his life, but not his left leg. His amazing courage and determination to resume playing his beloved piano gave him a goal that he has far surpassed. With Teresa at his side, they have accomplished this and more. We're so proud of you Lynn and treasure your musical gifts!

Choir was still struggling with good attendance after COVID, but moving practice time from 7pm to 4:30 pm has made all the difference. We have welcomed new members and encourage any who wish to join to feel free to show up on Wednesdays.

Bell choir is also back in full swing with 9-10 ringers, or ding-a-lings as we like to say. We did a bell pageant during Advent with hysterical parts by a grumpy donkey and many opinionated sheep telling the Christmas story from their perspectives.

I am continuing to add new music and have started purging older(not so good) music from the filing cabinets. Thanks to Liz Jaques and Maggie Sheldon for the organizational assistance.

Many thanks to Lynn DeWalt, Kathy Wiegand, and Amy Nelson for their musical talents on the keyboards and vocals.

KEENE VALLEY WELCOME CORPS

In January of 2023, the State Department created a new way, the Welcome Corps, for organizations to sponsor refugees seeking to live in the United States. A small, local group began to be trained, to look at our resources and limitations, and to write a plan for sponsorship that was accepted by the State Department in June.

Along the way, we held information sessions, raised money privately, and sought volunteers. KVCC has joined in sponsoring our efforts. Repeatedly, we have witnessed the hand of providence providing furniture, clothing, housewares, food, and money. We raised over \$8,000, all now spent, and received a great many in-kind contributions. The response of the community has been incredible.

In September, we welcomed Racheal and Naomi Mukangamo, sisters, living in Uganda at the time of their immigration. They are happily working at the North Country School and the Keene Valley Library. Thank you, Fritz and Karen. They live near the church on Ivan Brown Way. Although it was not a goal, Racheal and Naomi attend KVCC regularly

Many volunteers are continuing to give their time to transportation for work and shopping, hospitality, language development, finance, and other needs.

We were one of the first fifty groups in the country and the first in northern New York to welcome refugees through this new program. Being on the leading edge has brought challenges, and we are grateful for all the help in meeting those challenges.

Laurin McArthur, Debbie Rice, Elizabeth Davidson, Patience Whitman, Nancy McArthur, Dan Mason with Shawn LaMarche, John Sampson, Robert Rokosz and many more

MANSE DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Council Endorses Conclusions

Group Members:

Elizabeth Davidson, Howard Husslein, Dan Mason, Debby Rice, Fritz Sabbow, Larry Shipps, Liz Jaques, Paul Osenbaugh, Susy Doolittle, John Sampson. (special thanks to Nancy McArthur and Derrick Roebuck for their earlier active participation in this group).

After many months of serious deliberation and consideration, the group finalized their recommendations. Council met November 28, 2023 and supported the group's set of recommendations.

MANSE BUILDING—Apartment

- Team of 16 enthusiastic volunteers completed the short-term goal (2022), where volunteers rehabbed the apartment. It is now rented (achievable housing)
- **The discernment group does not support selling the building at this time. (Endorsed by Council, 11/2023)**

MANSE BUILDING—Office

- Liz Jaques worked with others on Spring Cleaning the major spaces(Flower committee, music director, children's area and others to clear the existing spaces as much as possible. Housekeeping task was very successful.
- The group agreed that the current church building spaces cannot house the Manse offices easily.
- While working at home works for some businesses, it is viewed that we are not willing to take that step at this time.
- **The discernment group recommends that we not move the manse office space into the main church building. (Endorsed by Council:11/2023)**

PROPERTY (land, beyond the building/manse)

- A **new draft survey** was completed of the approximately 1.38 acres to determine current borders, right of ways, utilities, etc. led by Nancy McArthur
- The group carefully considered possible options for land use.
- **The group reviewed possible options and decided to keep this asset...therefore, the discernment group does not recommend selling the land, or developing the land either in pieces or as a whole. (Endorsed by council:11/2023)**
 - We do not seem to be in the same financial situation as one year ago.
 - There is agreement from each attendee to NOT change the current land use
 - The parking lot is needed as we continue to expand our outreach, John Phillip Newell retreat, fundraising dinners, fellowship gatherings and more.
 - On achievable housing, local achievable housing organizations and the Town of Keene seem to be much closer to developing the Little Peaks property (Both Way).

Following the Council meeting, this summary was published in the weekly newsletters. No questions or comments were made to the Church or the team.

The Manse Discernment group has completed their charge.

KEENE FOOD MISSION

The KVCC Keene Food Mission continues to support seven families – for a total of 24 individuals – by funding accounts or providing gift cards around \$300 per month. Five of the families we serve have accounts funded at the Valley Gro, and two of the families enjoy receiving gift cards from Aldi. Donations continue to come to our Keene post office box, and we recently received a significant donation to our mission. Handwritten thank you notes from KVCC occur shortly after the receipt of the donations. The Keene Food Mission now has their own business checks and a debit card typically used to purchase the Aldi gift cards. Thank you to Nancy and John for helping to guide the implementation of this wonderful mission.

GROUNDS COMMITTEE

September 2022 - December 2023

The summer began with the church having our first “No Mow May”. As far as we know, no one in town objected, however it requires more work at the end of the month. On May 6 there was a grounds work day and later in the month a bat house was installed on the back of the garage. We also advised the Green Team at Keene Central School about their new pollinator garden.

The rainy summer kept the lawns and gardens lush. We were surprised by the change in the pollinator garden where plants grew and the flowers were colorful. We received many compliments from neighbors and visitors as they walked by.

Two grounds work days were held in October. On the 6th volunteers helped to plant daffodil bulbs in the pollinator garden. On October 19th we trimmed perennials, raked lawns and planted crocus on the front lawn. Additional raking was needed at the end of the month.

In December stakes were installed at the edge of the driveways with the hope that the lawn will not be damaged.

East Branch Organics mowed the church grounds weekly or bi-weekly from June through September.

CHILD CARE

The KVCC child care program provides guided free play for children during the Sunday morning service. While the number of children in our congregation is currently small, we do have a lot of fun playing games, doing art projects, and engaging in dramatic play. It is important that our kids feel that they have an important role in our church, and their participation in communion and the Christmas pageant, as well as the adults who go out of their way to greet them and talk with them, teaches them that they are valued and loved.

BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

Table 1

| Task/Project | Description | Date Rec'd. | Est. Comp. Date | Cost Est. | Assignee | Status |
|------------------------|--|----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------|--|
| VSR Chair repair (8) | Joints loose | 9/28/23 | | | Naj offered to repair | 3 done |
| Church Windows | Dirty | 9/28/23 | | | | Pending |
| A/V Room | Keypad lock not working | 10/22/2023 | | | Howard | Pending |
| Manse Apartment | Entry step facing board broken | 10/15/2023 | November 2023 | \$8.00 | Howard | Done 11/02/2023 |
| Manse Apartment | Rehang Stairway Door | 9/14/23 | 10/27/23 | \$0.00 | Howard | Done 11/05/2023 |
| Church Entry | Coat rack paint | pre 08/30/2023 | Spring 2022 | +/- \$45 | Volunteer | Pending |
| Church/VSR | Ceiling plaster work | pre 08/30/2023 | | <\$1000 | Contractor | |
| Church/Manse Siding | Clean | pre 08/30/2023 | Spring 2022 | <\$1000 | Cont. / Volun. | |
| VSR | Chimney tuckpointing | pre 08/30/2023 | | | Contractor | |
| Church Basement | Perimeter foam | pre 08/30/2023 | Spring 2024 | ~ \$5000 | Placid Foam? | Under Consideration |
| Church Basement | Dehumidifier | pre 08/30/2023 | 2022 | ~ \$2000 | | Under Consideration |
| Church Grounds | Wrought Iron Refinishing | pre 08/30/2023 | Spring 2024 | ~ \$200 | Volunteers | |
| Church | Shutter repair/repaint | pre 08/30/2023 | | | Volunteers | Under Consideration |
| Church / Manse Grounds | Walkway repair | pre 08/30/2023 | Spring 2025 | | Contractor | |
| VSR | Flickering lights | pre 08/30/2023 | | | Howard | Under Investigation |
| Church Grounds | Accessible Parking paving | 10/15/2023 | Spring 2024 | ~ \$12k | Contractor | Finished 11/13/2023 Sign in place. Striping in Spring |
| Church / Manse Grounds | Green Consumables | 09/15/2023 | Spring 2024 | ? | Involved parties | Exploring usage and quantities |
| VSR | Sm. Lav. commode seat loose | 09/15/2023 | | | Howard | Tightened 11/05/2023 |
| VSR | Side door latch fussy | 09/24/2023 | November 2023 | | Howard | Handle is old and difficult, May need parts that are unavailable. OK for now. 11/05/2023 |
| VSR | Gas log knob hard to reach with new screen | 10/27/2023 | Spring 2024 | | Howard | Will investigate repositioning log set and grate. |
| Church Basement | Furnace inspection req. per insurer | 11/15/2023 | | | | |
| Church | Exit signs req. per insurer | 11/15/2023 | Spring 2024 | | | |
| Church | Kitchen ext. door rehung per insurer | 11/15/2023 | Spring 2024 | | | |

| Task/Project | Description | Date Rec'd. | Est. Comp. Date | Cost Est. | Assignee | Status |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| Church | Church slow to warm | 11/07/2023 | | | Nick Pepe | Damper motor replaced 11/18/2023 |

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION

KVCC has successfully welcomed two sisters, two refugees from Africa, which included helping them gain housing and employment, and is working on other issues such as enabling them to get a driver's license and car. Lauren and Nancy McArthur, Elizabeth Davidson, and others led this initiative and are to be congratulated. They will provide a separate stand-alone report. M&SA offered to make a contribution towards the dental needs of the two women, if needed. Thus far, that offer hasn't been taken up.

The collaboration between us and the KCS Green Team re-establishing pollinators gardens is continuing. Last June, prior to graduation, the students got permission and installed a pollinator garden at the school, an effort supported by Pam Gothner and others who tend the church's garden. The students shared their progress at the Wild Center's Youth Summit on climate change in September. Next, the students hope to expand the size of the school's garden, and encourage the Town and other agencies to create pollinator gardens.

For our ongoing effort to "walk the talk" of our Creation Justice Church designation, we are in the process of switching all of the cleaning agents used in the church to greener alternatives.

M&SA, working with the Keene Diversity Advisory Committee, organized a well-attended trip to the Akwesasne Cultural Center and the Native American Traveling College, both featuring stunning murals created by David Kanietakeron Fadden. Jerry Huntley, founder of the nonprofit OurStoryBridge Inc., participated in the event and, while there, met with the Center's director Justin Cree, and offered to help them capture local stories, many in the Mohawk language as a way of supporting their efforts to expand fluency, especially by their youth. Cree and others at the Center agreed, and M&SA has been assisting Huntley apply for a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to that end.

We look to follow-up steps to this initiative and working more closely with the Keene Diversity Advisory Committee as we go forward.

Following the trip, Jane Haugh, co-chair of the KDAC has offered DAC to lead an implicit bias training session, but as it's a multiple day event, no decision as to when and if to host the session, the question being can we get enough people willing to make the commitment.

M&SA supported the creation of six ADA-compliant - and stroller-friendly tables and helped stain them at the Keene Community Center Pavilion on Church Street in Keene. The tables are now used at Pavilion, Marcy Field, and other public venues.

M&SA supported the presence of KVCC pastor and volunteers at the Saranac Lake and Plattsburgh Pride events as a means of furthering the work of the KVCC Open & Affirming initiative.

Sixteen refugee families will receive the well filled backpacks provided by our congregation thanks to the donations from our community and congregation. The value of each filled pack is \$75 as each contains a blanket, hygiene supplies, coloring book, crayons, legal pads, pens, folder, and healthy snacks for the arduous journey of coming to this country. The packs will be delivered to the depot for shipping to Church World Service this week.

Our church received a \$250 matching grant from the United Church of Christ for the second year to jumpstart our project. Elizabeth and Nancy thank everyone for making this incredible challenge reality.

Patience Whitman and Naj co-organized a presentation on antisemitism held at the church on Sunday August 20. Presenters were Tom Glaser, whose grandparents died in concentration camps, and his parents barely survived, and shared family's experiences; Susan Semegram president of the Lake Placid Temple, Rabbi David Joslin of Temple in Plattsburgh, and Karen Glass; reflecting on being part of a multi-faith couple. The session attracted a large crowd, was covered by local media, and was especially appreciated by the Jewish committee. Info re Tom Glaser: <https://www.holocaustmemorial-vt.org/glaser>

Led by Martha Swan, M&SA co-chair, the church co-hosted a screening of the award-winning film Return to Auschwitz: The Survival of Vladimir Munk held at the Keene Valley Library on Oct 24. Julie Cenapa, author of The Missing Star (upon which the doc is based) and Pastor John introduced the film and led a post screening discussion.

M&SA, assisted by the UCC Church of Elizabethtown and Lewis, organized a second successful Turkey Drive that provided Thanksgiving meals for nearly 90 Essex County families through Families First. Charlotte Lichtenberg stepped up the lead the drive on behalf of KVCC.

During Advent, M&SA provided \$600 donations to the Food Mission, now being taken over by KVCC, the Neighborhood House, the Keene Youth Commission, supporting scholarships enabling any child, no matter their economic situation, to participate, and Essex County Mental Health's suicide prevention initiatives (three Essex County residents died by suicide during the Thanksgiving week underscoring its importance).

We heard from Nancy McArthur that the church was facing a potential deficit for 2023. If needed, M&SA offered to make a contribution from the funds awarded to M&SA from the Annual Bazaar by the Congregation.

Naj has been in conversations with Ukrainian artists who are trying to support families, military, and others traumatized by war. They desire examples of arts activities that can help reduce pain, provide people safe ways of lifting their spirits, building resiliency, etc. Naj has reached out to the National Coalition of Arts Preparedness & Emergency Response and the members of the National Organization for Arts in Health for how-to examples, and to Dmitry Feld at USA Luge to put together Ukrainians in our region who would be willing to translate these texts into Ukrainian. Thus far, all have expressed their willingness to help. There's no question that these same materials could be translated into Arabic and Hebrew.

In December, Martha Swan said she is not able to serve another year as co-chair and Katharine Preston agreed to serve as co-chair beginning in January.

Going forward, we support the continued flexible approach that enables M&SA to be in a better position to address challenges and opportunities as they arise. We recognize that antisemitism is and will remain a great concern, and aligned with it, growing levels of hate not just in our country, but within our region.

STATISTICS

Necrology

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Pat Anderson | Julius Barreto | Jean Clifford | Richard Gaffney |
| Joan Hall | Doris Hamner | James Hastings | Courtney Iglehart |
| Jane Brown Knight | Annette Merle-Smith | Tia Preston | Roger Smith |
| Bruce Whitman | | | |

2023 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Finance Committee includes the following members: Nancy McArthur, Treasurer, Fritz Sabbow, Larry Shipps, Debby Rice, Elizabeth Davidson, Shawn LaMarche, and Robert Rokosz
Elizabeth Davidson acts as Interim Treasurer when Nancy McArthur is not available, including signing checks and approving expenses.

Endowment: Rev. Frederica Mitchell Legacy Fund

The endowment stands at \$1,461,628 at yearend having experienced modest growth in 2023 rising from \$1,341,299 at the end of 2022. The Finance Committee is monitoring the performance of the investment manager, SVB (formerly Boston Private), and will review the appointment this year.

Investment: The Annette Merle-Smith Legacy Fund

Vanguard will manage the initial \$100,000 gift from this \$400,000 bequest. The fund will be disbursed in accordance with the recommendations of the Discernment Group and the approval of the Council. The plan includes replenishing the Reserve for Repairs with \$12,500 from this fund.

Material Financial Events:

The year presented great opportunities for the church to serve its wider community while also funding needed costs of the church property. In addition to receiving the first instalment of the AMS bequest, the following are noted:

- Keene Food Mission is an exciting outreach opportunity but required significant initial funding until donations began to pour into the fund. Current balance exceeds \$20,000.
- KVCC's sponsorship of refugees Rachael and Naomi Makegame was funded by a small group of donors with major in kind assistance by many church members. Total raised was \$8,500.
- A long needed survey of the church's property was completed at a cost of \$7,000 revealing important information about our holdings.
- Paving the handicapped parking area was completed at a cost of \$12,500 absorbing all but \$2,000 of the Reserve for Repairs. As cited above, the committee requested that this fund be replenished from proceeds of the gift by Annette Merle-Smith.

2023 Annual Performance

As shown on the attached spreadsheet, KVCC finished the year with a gain of \$94,831; however when the \$100,000 Annette Merle-Smith bequest is removed, the church lost \$5,169 from core operations. While our earlier forecasts had forecast a modest surplus, unforeseen costs created this result.

Stewardship Campaign

Pledges totaled \$61,000, a slight decrease from \$63,000 in the 2022 campaign. The good news: more households pledged than in the prior year. Pledges assist the church in forecasting its ability to meet expenses and expand its mission, so the committee hopes to encourage greater levels of pledging by the community.

2024 Budget

The Finance Committee recommends approval of the budget at the Annual Meeting.

The budget is a breakeven budget considering that the AMS funds are not to be used for ordinary expenses. Continued focus on fundraising and expense control will allow the church to improve on these results and more importantly, to expand its service to the community.

Keene Valley Congregational Church

| Income & Expenses | FYE 2023 | Budget 2024 | % Change |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Income & Transferred Funds | | | |
| Endowment Draw | 75,100 | 74,760 | -0.5% |
| Misc. Income | | - | |
| Open/Plate | 10,083 | 9,000 | -10.7% |
| Pledges | 117,162 | 120,000 | 2.4% |
| Rental Income | 15,321 | 15,780 | 3.0% |
| Church Bazaar | 15,211 | 10,000 | -34.3% |
| Special Collection | 5,382 | - | -100.0% |
| Flower Donations | 250 | 250 | 0.0% |
| Total Special Collection | 5,632 | 250 | -95.6% |
| Use of Facilities | 1,423 | 250 | -82.4% |
| Total Income & Transferred Funds | 239,931 | 229,159 | -4.5% |
| Uncategorized Income | 100,000 | 100,000 | 0.0% |
| Total Income | 339,931 | 329,159 | -3.2% |
| Gross Profit | 339,931 | 329,159 | -3.2% |
| Expenses | | | |
| Bank Fees | 35 | - | -100.0% |
| Building Expenses | 2,037 | - | -100.0% |
| Custodian | 8,986 | 6,278 | -30.1% |
| Fire Security Sys | 5,133 | 500 | -90.3% |
| Manse | 1,250 | 1,000 | -20.0% |
| Piano Tuning | 402 | 450 | 11.9% |
| Reserve for Repairs | - | - | |
| Total Building Expenses | 17,807 | 8,228 | -53.8% |
| Grounds Expenses | | | |
| Grounds Interest Group | 616 | 620 | 0.6% |
| Lawn Care | 637 | 700 | 9.9% |
| Snow Removal | 4,815 | 5,500 | 14.2% |
| Total Grounds | 6,068 | 6,820 | 12.4% |
| Survey | 7,010 | - | -100.0% |
| Total Building & Grounds | 31,472 | 15,048 | -52.2% |
| General Expenses | | | |
| PayPal/Bank Fees | - | 124 | |
| Supplies | | | |
| Trash Service/Casella | 585 | 612 | 4.6% |
| Supplies | | 300 | |
| Office Copier Lease | 3,189 | 3,121 | -2.1% |
| Office Copier Overages | 335 | 340 | 1.5% |
| Office Supplies | 646 | 650 | 0.7% |
| Postage | 489 | 500 | 2.3% |
| Subscriptions | 4,075 | 4,000 | -1.8% |
| Total Supplies | 9,318 | 9,523 | 2.2% |
| Total General Expenses | 9,318 | 9,646 | 3.5% |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Ministry | | | |
| Fellowship | 384 | 435 | 13.2% |
| Flower Expenses | 255 | 481 | 88.6% |
| Mission & Soc. Action | 2,843 | 3,000 | 5.5% |
| Music Dept. Expenses | 853 | 558 | -34.6% |
| Pastoral supplies | 329 | 553 | 67.8% |
| Worship Int. Grp. (Diaconate) | 165 | 96 | -41.8% |
| Total Ministry | 4,830 | 5,123 | 6.1% |
| Missions/Acct. Transfers | 10,441 | - | -100.0% |
| Conference Expenses | 556 | 574 | 3.2% |
| Essex Assoc | 1,122 | 1,600 | 42.6% |
| OCWM | 6,692 | 6,718 | 0.4% |
| Total Missions/Acct. Transfers | 20,646 | 8,891 | -56.9% |
| Total Pastor Staff Expense | 102,556 | 107,000 | 4.3% |
| Substitute Pastor Fee | 1,375 | 1,200 | -12.7% |
| Total Pastoral Expenses | 103,931 | 108,200 | 4.1% |
| Staff Payroll | | | |
| Bookkeeper | 2,200 | 2,400 | 9.1% |
| Disability Insurance | 1,668 | 1,700 | 1.9% |
| Memorial Service fee | - | - | |
| Music Director | 8,798 | 9,034 | 2.7% |
| Musicians-Summer&Subs | 1,750 | 2,400 | 37.1% |
| Organist | 8,798 | 9,034 | 2.7% |
| Organist /Music Dir. Sub | 1,350 | 1,350 | 0.0% |
| Payroll Taxes | 3,552 | 3,700 | 4.2% |
| Secretary | 11,331 | 11,476 | 1.3% |
| Zoom Admin | 6,937 | 7,593 | 9.5% |
| Workers' Comp | 3,391 | 3,493 | 3.0% |
| Total Pastor & Staff | 153,707 | 160,380 | 4.3% |
| Utilities and Taxes | | | |
| Electric - Manse | 641 | 1,120 | 74.7% |
| Electric - Church | 1,711 | 1,509 | -11.8% |
| Heat - Church | 4,526 | 6,758 | 49.3% |
| Heat - Manse | 3,677 | 3,847 | 4.6% |
| Insurances All Risk | 9,705 | 6,000 | -38.2% |
| Internet Service | 362 | 416 | 14.9% |
| School Tax | 796 | 820 | 3.0% |
| Telephone - Church | 950 | 974 | 2.6% |
| Municipal Taxes | 583 | 600 | 2.9% |
| Water - Church | 1,224 | 600 | -51.0% |
| Water - Manse | 1,505 | 600 | -60.1% |
| Total Utilities | 25,679 | 23,244 | -9.5% |
| Total Expenses | 245,101 | 227,456 | -7.2% |
| Net Operating Income | 94,831 | 101,703 | 7.2% |
| Net of AMS Gift | (5,169) | 1,703 | |