



Church of the Cross

2023 Annual Report



475 West Higgins Road, Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

Phone: 847-885-1199

www.churchofthecross.online

ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA

January 28, 2024

Rev. Julie Peterson, Moderator

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Adoption of the Agenda

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New Business

Verbal Information regarding upcoming Sabbatical

Adjournment

Prayer

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES

Annual Congregational Meeting, Sunday, January 29, 2023

The Annual Congregational Meeting of Church of the Cross was held in person and via Zoom at 11 a.m. Moderator Rev. Julie Peterson called the meeting to order at 11:15 a.m. and opened with prayer. A quorum was declared. Minutes of the Called Congregational Meetings held January 30, 2022 and November 13, 2022 were approved.

A report on the financial position of Church of the Cross was introduced with remarks from Elder Jim Buchholz and presented by Treasurer Ken Groenewold. A detailed review of the church's financial reports and the 2023 budget was shared with the congregation, including the continuing dependance on withdrawals from our investments to cover the shortfall between contributions and the expenses associated with COTC's ministry and programs. The floor was then opened for questions.

The following reports were presented as printed at this meeting.

Congregational Reports:

- Pastor's report presented by the Reverend Julie Peterson
- Clerk of Session report presented by Pat Groenewold
- Deacon report presented by Nancy Keppel
- Nominating Team Report presented by Jane Lesch

Adelaide Grant-Acquah, Karen Franz and Jane Lesch were nominated to serve as the members-at-large on the Nominating Team in 2023. These nominees were approved unanimously.

Ministry Team Reports:

- Stewardship Team report
- Learning Team report presented by Sue Liautaud
- Worship Team report presented by Stu Truelsen
- Micah 6:8 Team report presented by Ken Groenewold
- Evangelism Team report presented by Jim Letterer

Corporation Reports:

- Corporate Operations Team report presented by Jim Letterer
- Property Team reports presented by Jim Vakoc and Charlie Keppel

Motion passed unanimously to approve the Terms of Call of the Rev. Julie Peterson for 2023 as presented.

NEW BUSINESS: Jim Buchholz spoke to the congregation about an additional opportunity to invest in God's work through an increase in pledges, one-time donations, and prayer. Envelopes were distributed at the end of this presentation.

There being no other business to come to this meeting, a motion prevailed to adjourn, and the Moderator closed the meeting at 12:37 pm with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Groenewold, Clerk of Session

Called Congregational Meeting, Sunday, December 10, 2023

A Congregational Meeting of Church of the Cross for the purpose of electing officers was held in the sanctuary following the Sunday morning worship service. Moderator Rev. Julie Peterson called the meeting to order with prayer at 11:10 am.

A quorum was declared.

The chairperson of the nominating committee, Susan Liautaud, thanked the 2023 Nominating Committee members for their excellent work this year and placed in nomination the following slate of candidates proposed by the nominating committee:

- For the office of elder:

Laura De La Cruz	3-year term	Class of 2026
James Buchholz	3-year term	Class of 2026
Cathy Walker	1-year term	Class of 2024
- For the office of deacon:

Christine Lorentz	3-year term	Class of 2026
Ann Moorman	3-year term	Class of 2026
Laurie Ulrich	3-year term	Class of 2026

The moderator invited nominations from the floor. There were no additional nominations put forward. Nominations were closed and the above candidates were unanimously approved.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Groenewold, Clerk of Session

CONGREGATIONAL REPORTS

Pastor's Report

In my annual report for 2022, I ended with an invitation to “lift your energy, imagination, and love up with the sail of your boat, and see how the Holy Spirit will work in and through you to the glory of God, Father, and Holy Spirit.” And **2023 was certainly filled with all sorts of ‘energy, imagination, and love!’** This annual report is loaded with how your joy of the Lord was lived out using those very traits.

In February, we held our annual leader retreat. One of the quotes we used to guide a portion of our discussion was Charles Mackesy quote from his book The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse. *“I can’t see a way through,” said the boy. “Can you see your next step?” (said the horse) “Yes” (said the boy) “just take that,” said the horse.* A reminder when we cannot see the way, we keep moving forward. Which led to a discussion on the **new missions started (Lilies Closet, and the Community for Conscious Contact).** Which then led to an honest conversation about these new missions that will fill our time. So, in our waiting to see what next step the Holy Spirit had for us we wondered what ‘side steps’ should we take. Some recognized these ‘side steps’ are like sailing which takes us in different directions. I think my favorite, though, was how these ‘side steps’ are like dancing—enjoy the fellowship of the dance, pause, reflect, and then enter the dance again. (Oh, and ‘keep practicing!’)

Well, the practice of dancing in and through **our ministries is where we have spent much of our time this year.** Lilies Closet has been bursting at the seams, with patrons and donations ~ a blessing to be able to offer clothing (and other things) to people in need, along with the labor-intensive work to sort, wash, fold, hang, etc. Being present when Lilies is open is certainly worth our time to see the joyful chaos dancing as we serve our community and build new relationships. Jane shares more in her report but let me offer my joy and awe for all Lilies' volunteers and their dedication. Lilies Closet is truly the Holy Spirit at work giving each volunteer the energy, intelligence, imagination, and love needed to roll up their sleeves in this challenging, yet vital ministry.

After a couple of young Hispanic women started worshiping with us mid-January, the worship team did a quick pivot to **begin including Spanish translations in the bulletin** so they could fully participate in worship. A HUGE thank you to Cheryl Wilkins for her willingness to read scripture in Spanish almost every Sunday. Another Holy Spirit blowing inspiration has happened in the past month with a Hispanic couple joining our worship. José has begun doing some of our readings in Spanish, a joy for us and an honor for him.

During my study leave in May, with the theme of “Innovation ~ Integrity ~ Ignition,” speakers shared how the church is in “effervescent need” of transformation even when we are not sure of the way forward. (Sounds like the Charles Mackesy quote.) **They noted there was a time in history when everything felt so lost. To which God sent Jesus, the Messiah, changing our world forever with his resurrection.** We serve a God of resurrection, they reminded us, so it's time we make a choice to ‘step out of the decline narrative’ and instead invest in the energy, hopefulness, effervescence of innovation, and ongoing experimentation as God's work in creation.

Innovation in the church, we learned, is humans co-creating with God. At our leadership meeting, we talked about ‘side steps’ they used this phrase, “to play in the intersections” (I really like this!) as we “build our confidence in God's future” turning to see our ministries in a community context.

I had to smile to myself at this statement because I believe serving our community has already taken ahold of our attention these past few years, even as we recognize God will continue to have new plans for us. **We have held several community events in service to our community this past year.** The Kenneth Young Center provided education, guidance, and activities here at COTC with a couple of buses of immigrants—grateful recipients of those things, as well as clothing from Lilies Closet. Hoffman Estates Social Services held a couple of events for the neighborhood surrounding COTC—a large health fair in July and a smaller mental health educational event. Lilies Closet organized a neighborhood party, which was very well received. The annual National Night Out with the Hoffman Estates Police Department in the parking lot. And of course, along with other activities mentioned within this report, our trip with the Dakota Partnership to Sisseton, South Dakota.

While this goes back a bit, our discussions about the Holy Spirit called us to sail on the *ruach*/wind of the Spirit looking forward instead of rowing with our backs to the future all by ourselves. Which led us to ask, ‘what is God calling us to be and do in this corner of our world at this time in our history?’ This is a good question for every year and every era for each of us. **In 2023, God opened the door, and we walked through it with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. A gift from the Holy Spirit grounding us in dedicated service.**

God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

Well done, good and faithful servants of our Lord,

Pastor Julie

Report of Clerk of Session

The Church of the Cross Session is the governing body of the congregation and functions in compliance with the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church, USA and COTC's bylaws in all its actions. The bylaws provide for nine elders to be elected by the congregation. Elders are normally elected to three-year terms and may not serve more than two consecutive terms (6 years) and may be re-elected after at least one year has passed.

The nine elders serving in 2023 were:

<u>Class of 2023</u>	<u>Class of 2024</u>	<u>Class of 2025</u>
James Buchholz	Ken Groenewold	Stu Rutter
Laura De La Cruz	Charlie Keppel	Stu Truelsen
Cathy Walker	Sue Liautaud	Cheryl Wilkins

The session had 11 regular stated meetings during the year and participated in a joint meeting with the deacons. Meetings were held in person and/or virtually via Zoom.

In 2023 the following teams supported the work of the session:

- Adult Learning Team – Stu Rutter
- Corporate Operations Team – Jim Letterer
- Evangelism Team – Jim Letterer
- Lilies of the Field Clothes Closet – Jane Lesch
- Micah 6:8 Team – Ken Groenewold
- Nominating Team – Sue Liautaud
- Property Team Inside – Jim Vakoc
- Property Team Outside – Charlie Keppel
- Stewardship Team – Jim Letterer
- Worship Team – Stu Truelsen

The session was also supported by the Treasurer, Ken Groenewold.

The pastor celebrated the Lord's Supper in worship 15 times during the year.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated with members not able to attend worship 11 times during the year. The pastor was assisted by a currently serving deacon each time.

There were no baptisms this past year.

There were no weddings this year.

There were three funerals for members Robert Lovell, Phyllis Lutz, and Lois McPherson.

MEMBERSHIP TABULATION FOR 2023

Membership reported at the beginning of the year		65
Membership gains during the year	2	
Received by Profession/Reaffirmation of Faith or Certificate of Transfer		
Membership loses during the year	-6	
Transfer	3	
Removal from the rolls	0	
Death	3	
Membership at the end of the year		61

In Memoria of Church of the Cross Members

PHYLLIS LUTZ
ROBERT LOVELL
LOIS MCPHERSON

PSALM 23

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Deacons Report

Our Deacons board consisted of 9 members most of the year until the death of Lois McPherson. Naana Grant-Acquah, Susan Buchholz, Nancy Keppel, Sue Letterer, Lois McPherson, Ann Moorman, Fay Michaelis, Glenna Morgan, and Jeff Peterson. Our Session representative was Cathy Walker.

The deacons' board met via Zoom and Hybrid during 2023 as well as using email to communicate financial requests. Many decisions need to be made quickly and email is a big help.

“Souper Bowl” Sunday took place and \$324.20 was collected for the Schaumburg Food Pantry. Vanessa purchased food items from Amazon and had it delivered to the pantry for those in need. Easter flowers were sold in the Narthex before and after the service and provided beauty to our sanctuary for our Easter service. **Proceeds from the 2022 Christmas Poinsettias and the 2023 Easter Flowers allowed the Deacons to purchase 27 - \$25 Walmart Gift Cards (\$675).** They were shared with our Veterans through Joe Palmer of We Who Serve. In April, we also **gave Gift Cards (\$1200) to families of Lakeview School so they could celebrate Easter with a nice meal.**

Candy (kisses and peppermints) was provided to members of the congregation and visitors on Mother's and Father's Day. **Birthday Cards were mailed monthly to recognize the special day in the life of our congregants. The Deacons also spearhead the food donations to the Schaumburg Food Pantry that are collected monthly in the Narthex. We celebrated a month of donations and Lois McPherson faithfully delivered them.** The Deacon and Session members continued to call and tend to their flocks as well.

We continued the **Community Garden planting** which started in 2021. Many volunteers donated seeds and plants to supply neighbors and the Schaumburg Food Pantry with fresh vegetables all summer long. Vanessa organized a watering system for the garden this year and many volunteers weeded and harvested the bounty of their work. Many thanks to Charlie Keppel, Judie Truelsen, and Vanessa Brand for their steadfast care for the garden.

The deacons are thoughtful in being good stewards of the funds provided to us to support our work. **The deep generosity of our congregation allowed us to support to the following:**

- Direct assistance requests – individual requests \$1733.37 plus \$550.55 were approved in December but was paid by credit card. Bill to be paid in January 2024.
- Sisseton art supplies and other expenses \$2456.59

Our relationship continues with Lakeview School and its Social Worker, Jessica Cychosz. We were able to make an impact on the lives of many children and families in our community through this relationship. We also verbalized that we felt confident our donations were being distributed fairly and used wisely with Ms. Cychosz as our liaison to the school.

- **March-April 2023 – a call went out for donations for Aldi's cards** to provide food during the Easter season. We were able to provide 30 cards at \$40 each = **\$1200**
- **August/September 2023 – a call went out for donations for warm coats through Operation Warm.** The school then determined that a shortage of school supplies was more pressing than coats. After a discussion with the donors, the funds originally donated for coats was transferred to a donation for school supplies. We were able to provide **\$1382 to the school.**
- **December 2023 – a call went out for donations for Aldi's cards** to provide food during the Christmas season. We were able to provide 48 cards at \$55 each = **\$2,640.** Even though we have not had an opportunity to directly interact with the children of families of Lakeview School, **it seems we have taken them into our hearts.**

We celebrated again with our community when we participated in the **National Night Out event on Tuesday, August 1st.** In conjunction with the Hoffman Estates Police and Fire departments, and other community businesses, we filled our parking lot with friends and neighbors and celebrated being together once again out in the great outdoors. Hot dogs and chips, cookies and soft drinks were served and enjoyed by all. It felt great to connect with our neighbors.

On a more somber note, **we lost several of our most long-standing congregation members: Phyllis Lutz, Robert Lovell, and Lois McPherson.** The deacons assisted in providing fellowship for friends and family members of two of these members following their memorial services at COTC as requested. The families expressed their gratitude for our participation in honoring their family members.

At the end of November, we once again put up the Christmas tree in the lounge with names of children from Shelter Inc. We provided gifts for 20 needy children that might not get any other gifts for Christmas. Many of them in group homes. COTC was complimented on their continued generosity to this program. They really appreciate knowing they can count on us to support them.

The Deacons sold several varieties of Poinsettias in Nov/Dec to beautify the sanctuary during the Christmas season. The net proceeds from the sale of the flowers will be combined with the Easter flower sale profits in 2024 to benefit the Veterans. Thanks to Sue Letterer for taking such good care of them, so that we could all enjoy them for several weeks in the sanctuary, and then delivering ones designated to go to Friendship Village on Christmas Day.

A few of our members are homebound temporarily or on a more permanent basis. The Deacons organize meals to be provided to those members with the help of many members. We couldn't do it on our own. Thank you to the many members who help us with meals!

These members also miss out on participating in the sacrament of communion and the comradery of being with friends. The Deacons accompany Pastor Julie once a month to deliver home communion to those who are confined to their homes due to the pandemic, poor health, or any combination of factors. Fortunately, through livestreaming services on Sunday mornings, as well as through phone calls and written notes we can all stay connected in these still crazy times of Covid and RSV and hip and knee replacements, etc. However, it was simple to conclude that in-person visits are invaluable and cherished by those who are confined to home.

The Deacons give our heartfelt thanks to Naana Grant Acquah and Fay Michaelis for all of her hard work and dedication to the Deacons. We will miss you as you leave the board. We welcome Laurie Ulrich and welcome back Chris Lorentz and Ann Moorman in 2024.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Keppel, Moderator

Nominating Team Report

Members: Sue Liautaud, Jeff Peterson, Karen Franz, Jane Lesch, Adelaide Grant-Acquah

The purpose of the Nominating Team is to present candidates for the offices of Ruling Elders, Deacons, and the three At-Large members of the Nominating Team to the congregation for their election to offices. The Nominating Team also oversees the completion of the annual Financial Review and the associated written procedures for the reviews.

The following candidates were presented to the congregation and were elected on December 10th to begin serving in 2024:

Elders:	Cathy Walker	Class of 2024
	Laura De La Cruz	Class of 2026
	James Buchholz	Class of 2026
Deacons:	Ann Moorman	Class of 2026
	Laurie Ulrich	Class of 2026
	Chris Lorentz	Class of 2026

The following **At-Large members to the Nominating Team** will serve one-year terms in 2024:

Adelaide Grant-Acquah	2 nd year
Karen Franz	2 nd year
Jane Lesch	2 nd year (<i>as an at-large member</i>)

The 2023 Financial Review Team for COTCs 2022 financial results was led by John Baker, Stu Rutter, Terry Maulding, and Bob Lovell and assisted by Vanessa Brand. The review was completed and accepted by the Session in September. There were no significant findings.

The work of nominating team members is vital to our congregation. Their work was, and is, greatly appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sue Liautaud, Elder & Moderator, Nominating Team

Stewardship Team Report

Theme:



General Fund	2022 *(note)	2023 *(note)	Change
Number of pledges	31	30	-3.2 %
Total money pledged	\$158,560	\$167,400	+4.1 %
Average pledge	\$5,114.8	\$5,580	+9.1 %

Major Maintenance Fund	2022	2023	Change
Number of pledges	19	15	-21.1 %
Total money pledged	\$22,400	\$20,695	-7.7 %
Average pledge	\$1,179	\$1,089	-7.6 %

Total Funds	2022	2023	Change
Total money pledged	\$182,910	\$188,095	+2.8%

***Note: 2023 comparison to 2022:**

14 pledges same as 2022; 1 pledge decreased from 2022; 13 pledges increased from 2022
2 new pledges, not pledged in 2022; 3 pledged in 2022 and not in 2023.

Your Stewardship Team,
Jim Letterer-Chair, Terry Maulding, and James Buchholz

Worship Team Report

In 2023, we reached into the worship playbook (pardon the football analogy) and took out two things which had not been done at Church of the Cross in years—an outdoor worship service and a handbell choir.

The **outdoor worship service and potluck** in the gym took place on August 13. The AV team made certain we had a sound system in the courtyard where the service was held. A week before, the position of the sun was noted at the same time as the worship service so we could place a canopy over the pastor and communion table. The Clavinova was moved outside for Dr. Robert Kania to play in the courtyard and lawn chairs were arranged. Pastor Julie's cellphone was placed on a tripod to stream the service, although a couple of times the phone had a "sunstroke" and had to be brought inside to cool off. There were contingency plans to move the service into the gym in event of bad weather, but God blessed us with a perfect day and a good turnout. A true potluck meal was enjoyed in the gym, and needless to say there was more than enough food.

The **handbell choir under the direction of Marie Rutter** met for the first time in August. Practice is on Tuesday evenings and the handbells were played at two worship services, one in November and one in December. The resumption of a handbell choir is a true blessing and a nice complement to the vocal choir, also led by Marie. The anthem sung by the choir is certainly a highlight of any worship service, but the prelude and postlude also are inspiring, thanks to Robert and his incredible talent on the grand piano and organ.

Our choir also participated in the ecumenical Thanksgiving service at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church and the Elgin Sing-Along Messiah in December. Pastor Julie was one of the clergy members who led the worship at Prince of Peace. During Advent, several choir members joined by a few others visited our shut-ins to sing Christmas carols and receive communion from Pastor Julie.

Worship service bulletins began being printed in English and Spanish. Most of the scripture readings are in both languages. Thank you, Cheryl Wilkins, and José Suarez, for reading the Spanish version. Kathie Darman and Laurie Ulrich were added to our contingent of worship leaders.

The liturgical year zips by before we know it, especially for those of us on the Worship Team. The banners go up in the sanctuary, and before we know it, they have to come down to be changed. Once again lovely flowers at Easter and Christmas brought color to our sanctuary.

We couldn't **sum up the Worship Team in 2023** without saying something more about Pastor Julie. For Advent she wrote a sermon series entitled, "Those Who Dream." She makes each and every worship service a meaningful offering to God and is a natural talent on the screen. We have faithful followers of our livestream on Facebook every Sunday.

Thank you, Worship Team members: Laura De La Cruz, Jane Lesch, Mike Lorentz, Marie Rutter, Judie Truelsen, and AV Team consisting of John Baker, Jim Moorman, Mike Lorentz, and Stu Truelsen.

Submitted by Stu Truelsen,
Worship Team Chair

Micah 6:8 Team Report

The Micah team seeks to support the congregation as COTC does God's work as we best understand God's will, by doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

We see social justice as love applied to systems, policies, cultures, and individuals. Our primary desire is to focus on racial justice, to be open and affirming to LGBTQ+ persons, and to support immigrants and refugees.

The Micah team seeks out and evaluates opportunities for the church as a whole to serve others. When we find an opportunity, we make recommendations (such as the clothes closet) to the session which then decides which opportunities to accept.

2023 activities included:

- the Kenneth Young Center brought 2 busloads of new immigrants to Lilies Clothes Closet.
- completion of an educational LGBTQAI+ pamphlet.
- a health fair coordinated with the Village of Hoffman Estates.
- non-denominational services are continuing in the lounge monthly for those in 12-step programs.
- met with Latino pastors to be more aware of ways we can respond to and support those individuals.

We are currently exploring ways to partner with the Chicago Presbytery and ways to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

We communicate with the Village of Hoffman Estates, POC, the Kenneth Young Center, other churches, and non-profit organizations to seek new opportunities and to communicate what is being done at COTC.

Respectfully submitted,
Ken Groenewold, Chair

Lilies of the Field Community Clothes Closet

Coordinators: Jane Lesch, Judie Truelsen, Laura De La Cruz.

Volunteers: John and Marilyn Baker, Susan Buchholz, Karen Franz, Jen Fuscone, Ken and Pat Groenewold, Sue Liautaud, Chris Lorentz, Ann Moorman, Julie Peterson, Marie Rutter, Cathy Walker, and many more!

Special Honor: Lois McPherson, who was so happy to be volunteering at the closet, worked really hard and made friends with all the patrons. Our dear friend, Lois, passed away suddenly in early November and now is watching over all of us from above. She is sorely missed by volunteers and patrons alike.

The Lilies of the Field Community Clothes Closet opened on November 8, 2022. Since that day the closet has provided over 28,000 items to about 300 families in our neighborhood who need clothing and small household items. The Lilies Clothes Closet provides gently used and some new clothing to our patrons free of charge. The closet relies on donations of gently used clothing and monetary donations from our congregation and our community. The closet received a \$5,000 grant from the Presbytery for the closet's needs in 2023 which was very helpful. In fall of 2023 we received a \$4,000 grant from the Presbytery for 2024. There will always be a monetary need as we purchase new underwear and socks for our patrons.

Currently our hours are:

- Tuesdays: 11 am – 1 pm
- Thursdays: 4 – 6 pm
- The first and third Saturdays of the month: 9 – 11 am.

The Kenneth Young Center brought 2 busloads of new immigrants to Church of the Cross for a day of food, talks, and an opportunity to “shop” for things from the clothes closet in January 2023. On that one day we served 139 people from 39 families, and we gave away more than 800 items. Early in 2023 the Kenneth Young Center provided training to our clothes closet volunteers with the goal of helping us to become more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. It was very informative and helpful, as we want to be as inclusive as possible so that all feel welcome at the closet.

In the summer we held a party to honor the **Six-Month Anniversary** of the opening of the clothes closet. We invited all the volunteers, donors and patrons of the clothes closet and we all had a wonderful time. There were hot dogs and a true potluck dinner and even a cotton candy machine! We were very pleased with the large attendance, as well as the opportunity to get to know and interact with our neighbors during this celebration.

In the fall of 2023, **High School District 211** contacted Church of the Cross to ask about using some of our space for one of their projects. During the conversation, the existence of the clothes closet was mentioned. That conversation led to the Adult Transition Program attendees volunteering in the closet 3 – 4 days a week. The participants in this program sort donations, wash clothes, and organize the closet. They have donated many bins and hangers in addition to their volunteer work. This relationship is working very well for us and for them. It is a wonderful relationship and a clear example of how the Spirit continues to work on bringing our church out into our community.

There have been many “**God Moments**” during this year with the closet. During the colder months, a woman rang the church doorbell and she said just happened to have \$2,000 worth of coats and boots in her car and was looking for a clothes-closet to provide them as a donation. The closet she was planning to give them to was actually a food pantry. She stopped in our parking lot to “google” a clothes-closet nearby and serendipitously saw the Lilies of the Field Clothes Closet sign in our window. We gratefully accepted those coats and boots, and they are keeping many people warm. I think God brought her to our parking lot that day.

Just as important as the clothing is the **relationships we are creating with our patrons**. The Village of Hoffman Estates held an event at the Church of the Cross this year with many booths of different organizations that can help new immigrants in our area. This was a well-attended event which we hope provided a lot of usable information for our patrons.

Many of our patrons speak Spanish exclusively. **The volunteers are always trying to learn some Spanish** words and our patrons are always trying to learn some English words. We use the Google Translate app to try to communicate. It is not always easy, but we do share many laughs as the translator app often makes ridiculous translations.

I would like to thank everyone who has volunteered their time at the closet. I am overwhelmed by the willingness of the whole congregation to pitch in and help with this project. The only way this project will continue successfully is if we can keep up the support of the congregation and get additional support from our community. We ask that everyone keep talking about the closet with their friends and relatives, while we continue to encourage donations and volunteering your time with the Clothes Closet.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Lesch, Judie Truelsen, Laura De La Cruz

Community for Conscious Contact

In October of 2022, Church of the Cross, through the Micah 6:8 Team supported the experimental formation of a non-traditional inter-faith worship service. The service was held monthly for six months to determine if there would be enough interest on the part of participants to continue the service once the six-month experiment was complete.

The service featured volunteers, who shared their stories of spiritual awakening and the ongoing growth of their faith walk. We played non-traditional music as part of the service and led silent prayer with candle lighting and guided meditation to help set the mood for prayer. Ultimately, the group attending this service suggested that they would like it to continue. It was scheduled for another six months, meeting once a month on the fourth Saturday between 5pm and 6 pm. Snacks and fellowship follow the service.

Jim Buchholz wrote a **grant to the Presbytery of Chicago for \$700** to purchase a wireless speaker system to aid in worship, pay for snacks and a celebration dinner in December. The service continues to be greeted with enthusiasm by the attendees, with attendance ranging between fifteen and thirty for the monthly services.

The service attracts many who are from the recovery community but are currently unchurched. Currently, we have not been as successful in gaining attendance from the local community of unchurched individuals looking for a more non-traditional service.

Whether we continue will largely depend on the willingness of the current participants to take ownership of the “designated speaker” portion of the program. Regardless of the outcome, I believe the program has been successful in bringing together, in community, a group that has experienced the opportunity to worship God in a way that works for them.

Submitted by Jim Buchholz

Adult Learning Report

The church provides several areas of Christian growth including devotions, personal Bible studies as well as Adult Sunday School and Men's Bible Study. This report covers both Adult Sunday School and Men's Bible Study for 2023.

Adult Sunday School

Classes meet in the Gathering Room at 11:45 am on most Sundays. Meeting here permits us to include several members on Zoom. Attendance generally ranges from 10 to 15 people. We began 2023 by completing our Advent study using the book *While We Wait*, by Mary Lou Redding. We began the study of *Who is My Neighbor?* On January 15. This is a study of what the Bible says about refugees. While the study is Bible based, each week we read and talked about real life refugee stories. We also talked about what we could do to help refugees in the circumstances they found themselves in. In late February we began a Lenten study, *Meeting Jesus at the Table* by Cynthia M Campbell. This study helped to give us a clearer and fuller picture of the meaning of the Lord's Supper. We began *Confessing the Beatitudes* by Margaret Aymer on April 30. This study provided an opportunity to explore the teaching of Christ and engage in the process of confession.

On July 9, we began our discussion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer, a German Pastor, died a martyr during World War! The book was translated from German in the early 1950's. We found that this book had much to say about how we live our lives as Christians today.

Beginning in early October and continuing into 2024, our source of discussion material is based on *Feasting on the Word* from Westminster John Knox Press. These weekly studies are based on Lectionary topics.

Recent topics have included the following –

- A Spirit of Thanksgiving
- The Two Great Commandments
- Fear Not!
- Loving the Least of These
- In and Thru Grace

We are happy to welcome new class members! Please join us.

Men's Bible Study

Men's Bible Study generally meets on Wednesday nights for one hour beginning at 7:00 pm. Two meetings are scheduled for January through May and September through November. One meeting is scheduled for June through August and December.

The group began 2023 by continuing its study of *LIFE LESSONS from ROMANS* by Max Lucado. The book covers Paul explaining all the wrong options, i.e., pleasure and pride, and the only correct one: Jesus Christ.

The next book the group studied was *Ten Men of the Bible --- How God Used Imperfect People to Change the World* by Max Lucado. The book study began in March and was completed in September. Some of the men discussed in the book are –

- Noah
- Job
- Jacob
- Moses
- David
- Lazarus

Men's Bible Study began its study of *Jeremiah – Six Themes Everyone Should Know* by W. Eugene March in October and finished it on January 10, 2024. The book discusses specific topics such as the "New Covenant" and the "Book of Consolation." The book proved to be very informative and was a good source of discussion for the group for several weeks.

The Men's Bible Study participates in providing refreshments for Sunday Fellowship at least once a year. Also, in prior years, the group organized and provided food for church members and friends at one of the concerts at Hoffman Estates' Summer Breeze. Many of the group's members participate in the church's outreach to the community such as National Night Out.

We are looking for new members. If you have any questions or would like the dates of future meetings, please let me know.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stu Rutter

Corporation Team Report

Members: Jim Letterer, President; Jim Vakoc, Vice-President; Ken Groenewold, Treasurer; Pat Groenewold, Secretary; John Harmon (congregation member); Terry Maulding (congregation member); Hank Morgan (congregational member); and Rev. Julie Peterson.

Corporate Operations (Corp Ops) meets monthly and as needed for emergencies. **This team is responsible for the church's budget and finances; building and grounds; other administrative matters; and personnel matters.** Following is a summary of major activities and accomplishments during 2023 in each of these areas:

Budget and Finance

- Monthly review of financial reports, statement of funds, general fund income & expenses, investment balances and making recommendations to session on financial decisions as required.
- Annual update of signing authority on bank and investment accounts.
- Summary financial information presented to the congregation periodically.
- Transfer cash from investments to general fund with session approval as needed for operations.
- Recommendations to Session for 2024 budget, including salary increases for staff.
- Periodically meet and consult with external investment advisor.
- Additional financial details are provided in the treasurer's report in the Annual Report document.

Building and Grounds

- Oversight of regular maintenance and repairs to the building with outstanding support from Jim Vakoc for indoor items and Charlie Keppel for outdoor work.
- Management of use of COTC facilities by other organizations, including fee rates, agreements, compliance with insurance and child protections policies, and reviewing new usage request.
- Supported various workday projects both in the building and on the exterior.
- Additional maintenance / repairs done in 2023 include: replaced 2 gym windows with plexiglass for more durability; added 2 chimney caps for protection from animals; more repairs to steeple; cleaned, stripped & waxed gym plus kitchen floors (done every 2 years); and replaced carpets in “Blue Room” and the library.

Other Administrative Responsibilities

- Review and execute contracts including heating / air-conditioning, insurance, lawn maintenance, snow plowing, and fire safety.

Personnel

- Pastor Julie has several action items for Corp Ops each month, including a discussion on how wonderful it is to have such a great COTC staff!
- Coordinate annual review for the pastor.
- Review and revise job descriptions as needed.

A big thank you to Ken, Pat, John, Terry, Hank, Jim V, and Pastor Julie for all their hard work on the Corporate Operations team in 2023!

Jim Letterer, COTC President

Property Team Report

2023 Inside Work – Jim Vakoc

- Adjust building timers for current time.
- Repaired gathering room wiring.
- Repaired kitchen leaking pipes.
- Repaired kitchen island sink faucet.
- Replaced 5 gym windows (2 plexiglass).
- Readied salt supplies for winter snow.
- Replaced exit & florescent lights.
- Replaced furnace filters.
- Added 1 hand truck for salt supplies.
- Set sanctuary fans for summer/winter.
- Thermostats adjusted per facility use.
- Workday projects, cleaning, etc.

2023 Outside Work & Workday Tasks – Charlie Keppel

- Cleaned windows, inside and out (this has been due for a while) in lounge, Nursery and Sanctuary.
- Cleanup wetland courtyard of debris. BSQ eagle scout project: removed invasive plants and planted natives in wetland.
- Removed dead and dying shrubs in courtyard and entrance.
- Cleaned out and applied cold patch to potholes in parking lot.
- Installed light and ring camera on the southwest corner of the gym to reduce vandalism of courtyard and gym windows.
- We had multiple outside windows that needed replacements due to vandalism.
- Courtyard: removed dead bushes, also dying shrubs at entrance to ground level.
- Painted courtyard outside doors.
- Courtyard: removed soil from the primary door, recut the swale, and glued back the retaining wall.
- Planted Hosta plants along the dripline under the gym roof to reduce splashing of soil onto lower bricks of building.
- Prepared vegetable garden for planting.
- Replaced Serviceberry by gym entrance.
- Washed screens for sanctuary.
- Cleaned up mulch beds and added mulch.
- Replaced burnt out outdoor and fluorescent lights.

