

Christian Education Annual Report of 2023

A Year in Pictures



In June, children from Sixth church joined with East Liberty Presbyterian Church for Vacation Bible School. Jenny Newman helped lead the event and Linda May, Pastor Sarah Robbins, and Cyndi Dickson volunteered.

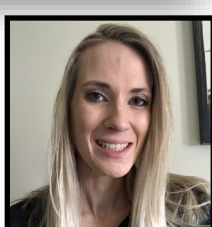
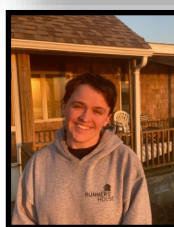
Sunday School



We have active Sunday school classes each week for all ages and Extended Session during worship. Our average number for weekly Sunday school is 8-10 students.

Our wonderful Sunday school teachers are Linda May, Meghan Jones, Gwen Harcar, Joe Ashenden, and Marcus Robinson.

Our child care staff is Kate Smith, Asa Parkhurst and Jenn McCartney.



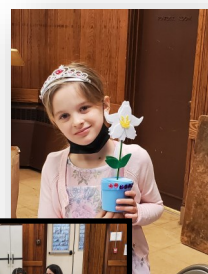
Sunday school students who finished third grade were presented with Bibles at the Church's annual June picnic. Five students received Bibles in 2023.



In June, July, and August we held Sundays on the Lawn—a time for families to gather for fun and fellowship.

Easter Story Walk

We celebrated Easter with an outdoor story walk and Easter crafts and activities.



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Throughout the church our children and youth have participated in and engaged in worship through our Time for Children and serving as acolytes and water pourers. We have provided weekly and seasonal resources for our young people and their families to learn and worship at home.

Youth Group



Youth Fellowship opportunities were held throughout the year and youth volunteered monthly serving meals at Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community. Sharon Manley and Joe Ashenden made many meals! In September we began collaborating with East Liberty Presbyterian Church for weekly youth group called Club 116.



Christmas Pageant



Sixth Presbyterian Church 2023 Annual Report from Committees

Church & Community

Sixth Presbyterian Church, like most churches, contributes a significant share of its resources to help alleviate suffering and correct the injustices experienced by our neighbors in our local, national, and international communities. The Church & Community Committee (C&C) is privileged to play a major role in Sixth's mission giving. Its approach to mission is perhaps unique in the thoughtful process we have created for allocating funds to deserving organizations and in the emphasis we place on advocacy for vitally needed social change.

Each year, Sixth devotes 10% of its total budget to mission, of which 40% is given to the mission programs of our denomination and the remaining 60% is allocated to "locally directed missions," a fund managed by C&C. In turn, C&C sets aside a small portion of our budget (\$600 in 2023) for the Youth group to distribute to worthy causes. We then, in accordance with a vote by members of Sixth, dedicate 60% of the remainder to advocacy groups that are working to create a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world, and 40% to organizations providing direct assistance to alleviate suffering.

One half of C&C's "advocacy" funds go to four committees at Sixth that are engaged in vital work for change: **Earth Care**, which devotes its efforts to protecting our environment; **Gun Safety**, which works to achieve common-sense gun laws; the **Justice Team**, which focuses on racial and economic justice; and **More Light**, which is dedicated to promoting LGBTQIA+ rights. These committees each divide their allocations among organizations making a significant contribution in their specific area of concern.

The other half of C&C's advocacy funds. Roughly 30% of C&C's budget goes into a pool that the C&C itself distributes to advocacy organizations. Similarly, 30% goes into a "direct assistance" pool, which is used to aid charitable groups. A final 10% is set aside for a direct assistance "Rainy Day" fund to address urgent or pressing humanitarian situations that may arise during the year.

All members and friends of Sixth are invited to suggest organizations for C&C to assist. For each organization, we prepare a detailed report of its mission and recent activities. Members of C&C (that is, anyone at Sixth who would like to participate!) vote on which organizations to assist. Then a subcommittee composed of the current and recent past chairs of C&C separates the organizations into advocacy or direct assistance groups to be supported by separate advocacy or direct assistance pools of funds.

All organizations are allotted points based on: 1) whether they are faith based; 2) the level of active participation by members of Sixth in the organization; 3) the percent of people of color on the organization's board; and 4) the organization's need for funds Sixth can provide.

Based on the resulting scores, the subcommittee recommends allocations. Then, members of C&C vote on whether to accept or modify the subcommittee's recommendations.

The allocations made by C&C are listed below in alphabetical order. Links are provided so you can learn more about each group. Please consider making your own contributions of time and/or money to these great organizations. Additionally, please consider getting involved in the work of Church & Community.

We could really use your help and benefit from your wisdom!

Organizations Aided by Committees:

Earth Care

Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future https://www.pennfuture.org/	\$760
Garfield Community Farm https://www.garfieldfarm.com/	\$760
Three Rivers Waterkeeper https://www.threeriverswaterkeeper.org/	\$760
Total contributions	\$2,280

Gun Safety

CeaseFire PA Action https://www.ceasefirepa.org/take-action/	\$1200
Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund https://www.everytown.org/	\$540
South Pittsburgh Peace Makers https://southpittsburghcoalitionforpeace.org/	\$540
Total contributions	\$2,280

Justice Team

Friends of Sabeel of North America https://www.fosna.org/	\$1,440
Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the PC(USA) https://www.theipmn.org/	\$1,440
Total contributions	\$2,280

More Light

LAMP (LGBTQIA+ Affirming Ministries of Pittsburgh) https://sites.google.com/view/inclusivepcusapgh/home	\$760
Shepherd Wellness Community https://qburgh.com/directory/shepherd-wellness-community/	\$760
Sisters PGH https://www.sisterspgh.org/	\$760
Total contributions	\$2,280

Youth Group

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of Allegheny County https://pgh-	\$200
Garfield Community Farm https://www.garfieldfarm.com/	\$200
Hugh Lane Foundation https://hughlane.org/	\$200
Total contributions	\$600

Church & Community Regular Direct Allocations:

Casa San Jose https://www.casasanjose.org/	\$993.77
Church World Service https://cwsglobal.org/	\$993.77
Deacons Hunger & Homelessness Initiatives (no website)	\$1,501.10
El Porvenir (no website)	\$1,242.21
Fishes and Loaves https://fishes-and-loaves-hazelwood.org/about-us	\$1,501.10
Just Harvest https://justharvest.org/	\$884.48
Lazarus Fund https://www.pghpresbytery.org/justice-ministries/lazarus_fund/	\$1,501.10
MHY Family Services https://mhyfamilyservices.org/	\$1,072.22
Pittsburgh United https://pittsburghunited.org/	\$2,211.21
Pittsburghers for Public Transit https://www.pittsburghforpublictransit.org/	\$1,768.97
Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center https://sabeel.org/	\$2,211.21
Table Ministry of the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community https://www.hotmetalbridge.com/our-mission	\$1,072.22
Wilksburg Community Ministry https://wcm15221.org/	\$1,286.66
Total contributions	\$18,240.00

Church & Community Rainy Day Allocations:

Table Ministry of the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community (reimbursement for meals) https://mhyfamilyservices.org/	\$1,520
United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East https://www.unrwa.org	\$1,520
Total contributions	\$3,040

CROP WALK

C&C would like to highlight the continuing involvement of Sixth Church in CROP Walk. On October 8, 2023 the Sixth Church team successfully completed another CROP Walk, raising money for the hunger and development programs of Church World Service. A portion of the funds raised stays local, going to the Wilksburg Community Ministry. This year Sixth walkers raised \$6540.11. Altogether, Pittsburgh East walkers raised \$28,524.15. The

Pittsburgh East CROP Walk was dedicated this year to Pastor Vincent Kolb. The CWS coordinator put together a video of thanks to Vincent for his support to the walk. Walkers PamTwiss, Peter Kaplan, Cliff Johnson, Nora Johnson, Leila Richards, Peter Koehler, Sue Koehler, and Lauren Ward all sent greetings to Vincent via the video. If you have any questions about the work of C&C, please contact Tom Twiss (ttwiss@pitt.edu) or Peter Kaplan (pghpeter9@gmail.com).

Respectfully submitted by Tom Twiss. (Thanks to Peter Kaplan and Sue Koehler for their help with this report.)

DEACONS

The Deacons continued their regular meetings via ZOOM in 2023. As the committee charged with the attention to and care of the congregation, the Deacons checked in with each other at the beginning of each meeting, to be sure to care for and support each other first.

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

Care List: The Deacons maintain a list of the church members who may need some attention or assistance, to be checked on regularly. This list is for public review, mostly by Session and Reverend Robbins, therefore people are removed from the list as their status or situation changes. The Deacons might continue to provide some attention or assistance privately to an individual removed from the list, should their situation warrant it.

At the end of 2023, there were 11 church members on the official Care List whose oversight was divided among 5 Deacons, Marnie Bertolet, Linda Davoli, Martha Funderburgh, Patty Halverson and Gail Luley. Each Deacon decided the best approach for themselves and their charge and provided support according to their individual schedules. The most common support includes conversations by phone, home visits, and meal assistance, although support may expand depending on particular needs and a response to emergencies. All efforts were recorded on the Care List Google document, which then was shared with all the Deacons.

Projects: Homeless Pacts, Lazarus Fund, Hot Metal Bridge Meals

The team working on homeless packs for the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community (Chuck Herrold, Elliott Hilton, Brenda Jordan, Lynn Kawaratani) spent \$2,254 (total for 4 shopping trips, in January, March, July, and October) on supplies for 240 packs, which were delivered to Hot Metal and distributed by them.

As treasurer, I (*Chuck Herrold*) wrote checks totaling \$16,000 in support of our commitment to the Lazarus Fund, assisting clients with payments for rent (chiefly) and utilities. Client interviews were managed and processed by Gwen Harcar.

Sharon Manley was reimbursed \$4500 for meal preparation for Hot Metal. This was a "retrospective" payment. Our commitment to this mission will be continued with a stipend

which we agreed to pay Sharon on a regular basis. Sharon's team of helpers includes Deacon Robin Holtje as well as other Sixth Church members.

EARTH CARE

It has been a busy year of revamping old programs and new initiatives. Our main focus was on plastic use and recycling. We also looked into how various recycling groups use the plastic.

Joe DeLucia who works in this area gave us the following information on the ways plastic is recycled:

1. Mechanical Recycling is what we are doing now with Michael Brothers. Michael Bros. is "recovering" the material from the public and then packaging it for a buyer who will recycle it mechanically (by cleaning, shredding and melting down into a new shape, but not chemically changing or breaking into its chemical components).

2. Chemical Recycling is where the waste plastic is catalyzed to break it down into very small molecules. The separate products that come out of this process can be used as fodder for "higher use" plastics, such as polypropylene #5.

3. Burning Plastics This method does use up plastics but emits CO2 and is not a clean option for recycling.

We continue to do a group collection of Plastics that cannot be collected curbside to take to Michael's Brothers. Various people are volunteering to take the plastic about every other month. The amount collected often fills up 2 cars.

On Earth Day in April, we challenged the congregation to reduce their use of plastic. The 50 challenge participants avoided purchasing plastic containers or using disposable plastic items over 800 times during a 3-month period. The assorted and colorful "fruit" sprouting from our tree art in the sanctuary are caps and lids, each representing 5 avoidances. By far the most popular activity was bringing reusable bags for grocery shopping and bringing a reusable travel cup or mug was next. Also common are purchasing loose produce or putting it in a reusable bag, buying foods in glass or cans, reusable lunch bags, and skipping the straw, dryer sheet, or plastic utensil. It was a great way to educate people and to make all of us more aware of where we can avoid using plastic.

Lynn Kawaratani created a wonderful gift guide on ecological friendly gift ideas that was shared with the congregation.

We are still working on revamping our recycling information on the Sixthchurch.org website. We cleaned out most of what was downstairs and have found new places to Recycle most of the items. Check out sites like Staples stores for any tech items, batteries, pens, mechanical pencils or markers. Also check out Center for Creative Re-use for many items that you may of not even thought about recycling.

We are still debating on what to do with the snack bags as they are mixed plastic. The company, Terra Cycle was not always clear what they were doing with the plastics. Also it is a significant cost to obtain the containers and ship it to them. We have not been able to find a local site that takes this type of plastic yet.

Respectfully submitted, Pam Howe

FELLOWSHIP

Members: April Clisura, Denise DeJong, Brenda Flores, Vicki Guy, Patty Halverson, Lynn Kawaratani, Kate Kennedy, Lori King, Mary Lang, Sharon Manley, Linda May, Barb Parees, Kathi Robinson-Dassel, David Wells

2023, though not quite “pre-Covid normal”, saw the return to a few Sixth Church Traditions. We served a sit-down Pancake Supper, presented the ever-popular Deviled Egg extravaganza on Easter Sunday, assisted the More Light Committee in providing a reception after worship on More Light Sunday, organized the early June Picnic in the Park, provided a standing luncheon following the Children’s Christmas Pageant and spread the cookies on Christmas Eve.

Refreshments were provided following memorial services for Emily Hoffman and Joan Gaul.

Respectfully Submitted - Lori King and Jan Myers-Newbury

GUN SAFETY

Members: Judy Schryer, Diane Scanlon, Lori King, Martha Funderburgh, Lara Miller, Lori Swensson

We welcome new members: Rae Hodge and Julie Caryl and visiting from Church of the Redeemer: Marinne Novy.

Focus: This continues to be the passage of gun safety legislation.

Actions in 2023:

- Some of us attended the CeaseFirePA Advocacy Day in Harrisburg on March 23rd.
- Wrote to PA House Speaker, Mike Rozzi, asking him to change House rules so that a single person (the committee chair) would not have the power to prevent bills from passing out of a committee. No response, alas.
- Wrote to Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh (Diane S.Hupp, Director) thanking her for joining hospitals across America to fight against gun violence.
- Tried to find local constituents to lobby Allegheny Co. Representatives in areas beyond Pittsburgh by asking them to support the four Common Agenda Items: ERPO, Mandatory Reporting of Lost and/or Stolen Guns, Safe Storage Requirements, Universal Background

- Checks. Result: It was difficult to locate people beyond our immediate area to lobby.
- Wrote to U.S. Representative Jared Golden of Lewiston, ME, to express our condolences and thank him for changing his position so that he is now against the AR15 rifle. We also asked him to consider supporting further gun safety measures.
 - Presented in front of Sixth during the October 7th Squirrel Hill Night Market asking people to lobby Lisa Baker to allow gun safety measures approved by the House to pass out of her committee. CeaseFirePA provided us with a QR code people might use for a direct link to PA Senator Baker. Result: Many people scanned the QR code. We don't know how many followed through.
 - Currently drafting letters to Senators Casey and Fetterman expressing our concerns about the commercial sale of ammunition manufactured by the Army that was tied to mass shootings in Uvalde, Buffalo, Aurora, the Parkman School and other locations.
 - Currently drafting letters to these same Senators expressing our distress to learn that weapons from gun buy-back programs are not completely destroyed, but rather one part (which contains the serial number) is destroyed and the rest of the gun is sold as a kit to be reassembled. We are asking them to take up this problem and find a better solution so that buy-back guns do not end up back on the street.
 - Currently drafting a letter to Lisa Baker asking her to allow gun safety measures to pass out of her committee and explaining to her why we care about this issue.
 - Completed The Good that Is Ours to Do statement for the Stewardship drive

Respectfully submitted, Lori Swensson

HOUSE

This year has been relatively quiet. We have had some roof leakage with water penetrating the sanctuary by the corner under the bell tower. This resulted in some paint and carpet damage that has been repaired. New carpet tiles were installed and the painting was done by Harry Kirk, our maintenance person.

A sizable portion of the plaster ceiling in the little kitchen/coffee room on the main floor collapsed and we had an emergency repair made.

Harry has refinished some of the wood trim work in various areas in the church.

There have been some leaky plumbing fixtures and a light fixture which were replaced.

Further work has been done on the refurbishment and reinstallation of the stained-glass windows in the Sanctuary. Leslie Kaplan, who heads our Capital Campaign, reports that there is one more window to go. Leslie has also been instrumental in caring for the landscaping and greenery around the church.

The fire suppression system in the main kitchen was connected into the fire alarm system.

New wireless microphones were purchased replacing the often faulty ones.

We have had some problems with litter and debris around the ground of the church.

This has been particularly noticeable around and in the window wells to the basement. One way we hope to address this in 2024 is the installation of sturdier window well covers. The current ones are either missing or are damaged.

A special thank you goes out to all our volunteers who help to close the church after services.

PERSONNEL

The Personnel Committee is responsible for ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for staff and volunteers, are compliant with local, state and federal labor laws, and in accordance with guidance provided by the Pittsburgh Presbytery.

Throughout the year, the committee meets with staff, as needed, to conduct business related to benefits, compensation, schedules, workloads, opportunities for growth and challenges or emerging needs.

Needless to say, it has been a year filled with change among our staff, beginning with Pastor Vincent's need to take medical leave and his decision to ultimately schedule his retirement; Session's decision to hire Sarah Robbins as our Interim Pastor and ending the year with Amy Whipple's resignation from her position of Office Administrator. (Whew!) Currently, the Pastor Nominating Committee has begun their search for our next Pastor and a separate search committee has begun its process of selecting a new Office Administrator.

The Personnel Committee stands in support of both committees and will ultimately be involved in the hiring process for new staff when they are identified.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Personnel Committee: Barb Parees, Carol Emerson and Andrew Swensen

STEWARDSHIP

Committee Members: Peter Kaplan (Chair), Beth Hazlett, Patty Halverson, and Barb Parees.

Supporting Cast: Reverend Vincent Kolb (idea for theme); Amy Whipple (pledge tracking and brochure production); Reverend Sarah Robbins (Stewardship Sermon and essential leadership); and Session Members (follow-up calls to obtain pledges).

The recently completed 2024 Stewardship Campaign faced some significant challenges. Early in the year, we learned that our beloved Pastor Vincent could no longer serve us due to illness. Over the past two years, a number of long-time members of Sixth Church have either passed away, become ill, moved away, or left Sixth Church. As a result, we could no longer rely on their historically generous support.

The good news is that members of Sixth Church responded to these challenges with faith, love, and resolve. Your pledges totaled \$341,340, or 93.1 % of our campaign goal of \$366,700. With the addition of a household which reliably donates but did not pledge, the Stewardship Committee believes that we will receive donations of \$350,700, or 95.6% of our goal. Given this year's circumstances, we consider the 2024 Stewardship Campaign a success.

Planting the Seed

Before Pastor Vincent went on medical leave, he proposed, and the Session approved, a theme for our upcoming Stewardship Campaign – “The Good That is Ours to Do.”

Explaining this theme, Pastor Vincent acknowledged that we aren't able to realize many of our dreams for a better world. But he pointed out that we always have the opportunity to make a difference in our small corner of the world, using the gifts, talents, and skills we possess, and the faith that compels us to a life of service. We choose to do the good that is ours to do and see what God will do with that.

We embraced the theme enthusiastically, because, as Patty Halverson noted, “it fits Sixth Church like a glove.” The theme gave congregation members the opportunity to share personal stories of caring for others. In doing so, they reminded members of Sixth that helping those in need, and working for a better community, are essential values of our congregation. We believe this compelling theme was an important contributor to the success of the campaign.

Putting the Plan Into Action

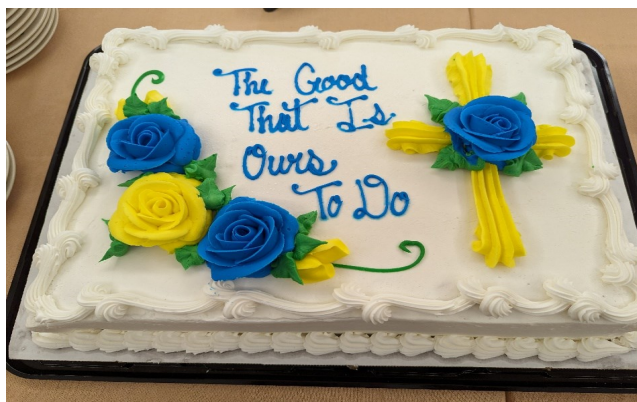
During the summer, we recruited prospective storytellers through a Sixth Sense article and an in-church announcement. We received positive responses from almost all of the people asked, and two people volunteered without our even asking! The following people shared their stories, and their love for Sixth Church, with the congregation:

Moments for Stewardship During the Worship Service in October and November: Amy Whipple, Peter Gilmore, and Leila Richards.

Written Testimonials for the Stewardship Brochure and Display in the Chapel: April Clisura, Chuck Herrold/Jan Myers-Newbury, Jason Shifflet, and Sara Berg.

With this foundation, the Stewardship Campaign shifted into high gear in October. The Stewardship letter and brochure were mailed on October 20th. Pastor Sarah preached an excellent stewardship sermon on October 29th. To reinforce our storytellers' messages, we republished them in a “Special Stewardship Section” of the November Sixth Sense.

On November 5th, the congregation dedicated its pledges, time, and talents to Sixth Church. After the service, we hosted a well-attended fellowship hour. The event featured a cake inscribed with the stewardship theme, as well as banana bread, cheese, and fruit. We also



mounted enlarged copies of our storytellers' words, with their pictures, in the chapel. The Stewardship Committee provided the food, and Leslie Kaplan helped create the storyteller displays.

The Final Push

By early December, we faced a potential shortfall in the campaign. In response, we sent out an email to the congregation and produced a bulletin insert urging members to: submit their pledges if they hadn't already done so; consider making a pledge if they hadn't pledged in the past; and increase their pledges if they had already made one. The response to this request was remarkable. Thirteen Church households agreed to increase their pledges by a total of \$12,339, and we received all but a handful of the remaining pledges that were outstanding.

We are deeply grateful for the generosity, faith, and love that you have shown Sixth Church!

The 2024 Stewardship Campaign in Numbers

Pledge Goal: \$366,700

Pledge Actual: \$350,700

Average Pledge: \$3,940, up from last year's \$3,724

Total Pledges: 89 (including 4 new) down from last year's 97 pledges.

Pledge Increases: 56 of the 85 households (66%) who pledged to the 2023 campaign increased their 2024 pledges by at least 1.5% (the increase we requested).

WORSHIP

2023 was a year with a lot of changes for Sixth Church. Much of the year in the church was marked by going into post-pandemic mode, saying good-bye to Vincent Kolb and bringing in Sarah Robbins as Interim Pastor. The Music and Worship Committee was able to help normalize the life of the church during these times of change.

Starting with the music part of worship, we saw the expansion of vocal scholars in the

choir. The committee is firmly committed to keep this program going. The quality of the music is integral to the quality of the worship. We all continue to appreciate what Douglas-Jayd Burn continues to bring to the program. One issue that is ongoing is continuing to consider getting an upgrade to the present piano situation. Definitely on the docket for 2024 is figuring out the logistics of having a piano in a safe humidity/temperature and finding a way to keep it on a flat, level surface. These are costly prospects and further research is needed.

The committee worked to continue the feeling of familiarity, especially at holidays, while giving the new leadership the freedom to personalize the worship experience. This will always be a work in progress. One change has been the frequency of guest preachers. This has been a positive change; each guest has been engaging and challenging in many different ways.

The engagement of Pastor Robbins has been a very positive stabilizing influence over the past months. The quality of the preaching and the engagement with the Sixth community have been very important during the time of change.

In 2024, these are the challenges I see facing us:

Listening to the congregation and pinpointing where we fall in inclusive language. I think we're getting close but perhaps this will also be an issue that is never conclusively settled.

Figuring out the best way to have contact with both the visitors in house and the ones online. This will probably involve some tech savvy individual(s) who can figure a way to get both giving and contact information from those online that wish to share in those areas.

Engaging the greater community - I think the involvement at the Night Market was a positive step and hope we can expand on that. I also remember in years past we would have some Pitt and CMU students who would join us during their time as students. I would like to see more outreach in this area.

We will always be working to find the right balance between tradition and following the tastes of the pastoral leadership, keeping in mind that we will have another inevitable change.

I have high hopes for 2024 and what we can do while embracing tradition and prayerfully changing in the best possible ways.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Bell (Chair, Music and Worship Committee)