

First UU Church of Austin

Settled Minister

Austin, Texas | Southern Region

Regional Contact: Rev. Tyler Coles | tcoles@uua.org

About First UU Church of Austin

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.austinuu.org>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

4700 Grover Ave
Austin, TX 78756-3108

This Congregation **has** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

Under Rev. Meg Barnhouse's leadership, the congregation evolved to become more loving and welcoming, while intercultural welcoming is still a work in progress. There is an orientation toward social justice and giving to the community, with many of our members involved in local area non-profits besides what the church itself does. The arts and music are a big part of our congregational culture. So are humor, fun and fellowship. A perfect example that demonstrates this aspect of our congregation is the Zoom variety show hosted by the fellowship committee in 2021. Through the tough pandemic years we lost some membership, while many long-term members remained faithful to our congregation. Recovering from the pandemic, we have seen a large number of new members and visitors to the church, many of whom attend only virtually.

During the interim period following Rev. Barnhouse's departure, the congregation has remained vibrant and energized, and there is a general sense of optimism, along with some anxiety, about its future.

On any given Sunday, the feeling in the church sanctuary is vital and energetic. Reflective of this energy, our membership is quickly increasing. We have added over 60 new members, bringing our total to over 500. New members report finding a sense of community and good energy in our worship services, in our fellowship hour after church and in the many opportunities they are finding to participate in the life of the church through volunteer and small group activities.

Your Congregation's mission:

Together we nourish souls, transform lives, and do justice to build the Beloved Community.

Also refer to the church's Values, Mission, Ends and Covenant page:
<https://austinuu.org/wp2013/about-us/values-mission/>

Describe and provide examples of how your Congregation lives its values:

Below we list many of the currently ongoing activities, but this is not an exhaustive list.

First UU Austin Cares Council — The Caring Ministry's mission is to promote a closer community and nourish souls by offering a listening ear, recognition of joys and concerns, or compassionate assistance.

Chalice Circles & Wellspring — Small group ministries that offer opportunities for spiritual growth as well as a chance to get better acquainted with other church members.

Fellowship — The Fellowship Committee is charged with creating opportunities for folks to gather in community. Over the past year we've held a Halloween celebration and a no-rehearsal Christmas pageant.

Religion & Worldviews and Mind and Meaning Bookclubs — The Religion & Worldviews Bookclub discussions cover a wide, inclusive range of fiction and nonfiction titles, all nominated and voted on by regular participants. The Mind and Meaning Book Group reads and discusses current non-fiction books and articles on a wide range of topics related to the natural world and the place of humankind in it.

Gallery — The mission of the gallery is to promote a unique venue for creativity and imagination while promoting equality and accessibility in the art community.

Mindfulness Meditation — We typically chat for a few minutes before bringing our focus onto our breath and begin a short period of meditation (about 10 minutes). After the meditation we read a poem (or two) and then discuss.

Paradox Players & Readers Theater — A volunteer led local theater production company. This group is currently on hiatus.

BIPOC group — This group is for those who identify as Black, Latinx, Asian, indigenous or multiracial.

UU Men's Luncheon — We meet with other UU men from the Live Oak, Wildflower and Georgetown congregations.

Women's Spirituality Group — This group is for women who are high school age and older.

Young Adult Worship & Emerging Adult Covenant Group — The former is an informal worship service for 18-35-year-olds. The latter is covenanted groups of 15-25 year olds. Both meet once a month on zoom.

Social Action Council — Two leads chair the committee with coordinators facilitating six pillars: Reproductive Justice, Racial Justice, Environmental Justice, LGBTQ+ Rights, Democracy and Immigrant Rights, and they also conduct a congregational vote annually to choose 12 non-profit groups doing justice in the community who receive financial support from Second Sunday Offerings. Plus, congregants learn how they can volunteer with these groups.

Further details of the 6 pillars are:

- Reproductive Justice, they meet monthly and conduct fundraisers to help promote abortion access and currently are partnering with the Austin group Black Mamas ATX, helping them to fund dulas and other needs of pregnant women.
- Racial Justice, this group reads books and meets to discuss them and members sometimes work with a community group called Undoing White Supremacy Austin.
- Environmental Justice with Green Sanctuary, which is committed to integrating earth-friendly practices into our church's work, educating the congregation on environmental issues, and advocating for environmental justice in the Austin community.

- LGBTQ+ rights with the Community Heart Circle - Community Heart Circle is designed to connect LGBTQ community members in a brave, safe, loving and kind facilitated space.

- Democracy, this started as UU The Vote — with UUs participating in postcard writing campaigns to encourage individuals to check their voter registration status and to vote, and it's evolving into knocking doors and gathering in parks to promote current issues in Austin as some policies voted on in the city have been under attack at the Texas State Capitol.

- Immigrant Rights — First UUs' Inside Amigos group partners with local immigrants, including The Foundation for the Austin Sanctuary Network — (ASN) is a coalition of faith communities, immigrants and other community members working to teach Know Your Rights and to stop deportations, along with having most recently helped an immigrant, who used to take sanctuary at First UU, get Deferred Action Status and a Work Permit in spite of having a deportation order.

Religious Education classes — PreK-Kinder Class, First-Fifth Grade Class, and Middle School Youth Group meet every Sunday.

New Member Classes — Those interested in joining the church as members are introduced to our faith and the expectations of membership. Newcomers are invited to sign up for a conversation with a member of the Transformation, Connection, Service team. These conversations are meant to introduce new members to others who can connect them to social and service opportunities within our complex and sometimes somewhat gangly organization.

Trans Inclusive Congregation Trainings — A small but dedicated group of members participated in the Trans Inclusive Congregation training program developed by the UUA. This is one of many examples of the congregations' dedication to LGBTQ+ rights.

Healthy Relations Team — A group of members dedicated to fostering right relationship and ensuring that the congregation adheres to its Covenant of Healthy Relations.

Earthkeepers — The church's landscape committee, which focuses on aligning the church grounds with the biome of local wild spaces.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

Worship service schedule:

Weekly, Sundays at 11:00 AM CST. Both in-person and virtual options available for attendees. Note: If attendance goes up, we hope to revert to two services every Sunday.

Personnel

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Chris Jimmerson	Co-Lead Minister	40	2022
Michelle LaGrave	Co-Lead Interim Minister	40	2023
Gretchen Riehl	Vice President/Chair	Volunteer	2023
Victor Cornell	President/Chair	Volunteer	2023
Shannon Posern	Congregational Executive Director	40	2015
Kelly Stokes	Director of Religious Education	29	2019
Bethany Ammon	Guest Musician	1	2018
Brent Baldwin	Director of Music	40	1999
John Cates	Sunday Tech Coordinator	1.5	2016
Chantel A Mead	Children's Choir Director	1	2016
Juliane Orlandini	Guest Musician	1	2021
Maria Katrina Saporantos	Assistant to the Director of Music	21	2017
Alessio G Sarmiento	Sunday Technical Director	2.5	2021

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Steven J Serpa	Guest Musician	1	2020
Sasha Lorenzo	Office Manager	40	2023
Kinsey Shackelford	Re Assistant, Membership Coordinator	40	2021
Julie Heilrayne	Childcare coordinator	3.5	2023

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

Unitarianism was brought to Austin by the Reverend Edwin Miller Wheelock, a Harvard educated lawyer and theologian who was born in New York City on August 30, 1829. He became minister of the Dover (New Hampshire) Unitarian Society the year following his 1859 graduation from Harvard Divinity school. He was a colorful and storied figure who was a student and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Wheelock was a Chaplain in the Union Army and a noted abolitionist. So committed to this cause, he gave a stirring sermon on Sunday, November 27, 1859, endorsing and supporting the failed raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (today West Virginia) by fellow abolitionist, John Brown. Brown, in October 1859, intended the raid to start a slave liberation movement that would spread to the southern states. Those of Brown's men who had not fled were killed or captured by local militias and U.S. Marines led by Robert E. Lee. Brown was tried for treason against the Commonwealth of Virginia and was hanged on December 2, 1859, the first person executed for treason in the history of the United States. Wheelock's sermon was so well received that the Rev. Theodore Parker invited Wheelock to deliver it from Parker's pulpit in Boston. It was also published in newspapers, and today is registered in the Library of Congress. The state of Virginia issued a \$1,500 bounty for the capture of Wheelock, dead or alive.

Soon after the Civil War, Rev. Wheelock came to Austin in 1868 with his wife Ellen Brakett Wheelock (b 1830), and children Charles Brakett Wheelock (b 1856) and Emilie Wheelock (b 1861) from the gulf coast where he worked at the Freedmen Bureau designing curricula for teaching newly freed Black children to read. They

lost their 3rd child, Elsie Plumbey Wheelock, to illness in 1867 when she was about 6 months old. The Wheelocks moved for his wife's health and also at the request of Texas Governor (and former slave owner) Elisha M. Pease, who appointed Rev. Wheelock to the Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1867. He was needed in Texas to prepare the States' public school system for its newly freed Black citizens. For the next twenty years he would hold several Texas political and governmental positions including official reporter for the State Supreme Court, Alderman, editor of The State Journal, and Superintendent of the Institute for the Blind.

In 1887 Wheelock briefly left Austin to organize the Unitarian Society of Spokane, Washington, and served two years as its minister. He returned to Austin in 1891 and started the First Unitarian Society here in 1889 with 58 charter members, including Rev. Wheelock, his wife, Ellen, daughter Emilie, and Emilie's husband, John Howson. Wheelock was often political in his sermons and was outspoken on the topics of the rights of labor, the abuses of the leaders of industry, monopolies and trusts. He was always a champion of the oppressed. Rev. Wheelock and his wife appeared to own property in Austin but lived humbly off that income in boarding houses. Rev. Wheelock owned the large 3-story house at 717 San Antonio, that Emily and her husband John occupied. It was said to have "apartments" and housed several families as well. Wheelock never lived there, but called it "the Howson place". Health problems caused him to retire in 1899, and he spent his last years studying the works of Thomas Lake Harris. Wheelock's wife, Ellen, died in 1895 and Rev. Wheelock died in 1901 at the age of 72. Curiously, he wanted his manuscripts destroyed upon his death, but they survived and belonged to this church for many years. In the 1960s, they were given to the Austin History Center and others were sent to the American Unitarian Association. Austin's Unitarian fellowship continued through World War I.

Rev. Wheelock's daughter, Emilie, was married to John D. Howson, of Littlehampton, England, who was associated with the International & Great Northern Railroad and the Austin National Bank. They had one child, Edwin, who died as an infant in 1889. Emilie was a charter member of the Austin Woman's Club and was active in organizations supporting the Women's Suffrage movement, including the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs, YWCA, and the Austin Women's Alliance. She carried the mantle of Unitarianism in Austin for the rest of her life.

Austin Unitarianism survived quietly, evolving after WWI into the Community Church of Austin, with the support of the American Unitarian Association. In the winter of 1951 it changed its name to the Unitarian Fellowship of Austin. Services

were first held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kuhatschek. The fellowship quickly outgrew the home environment and moved its meeting place to the YWCA Administrative offices at 914 Brazos Street. By 1953, the fellowship moved to the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs building, sponsored by Emilie Howson. Over the next 2 years a church school was opened with 12 children attending. The Unitarian Fellowship continued to grow and to offer more services to people interested in liberal religion in Austin. Among the founding members was Emilie Wheelock Howson who was by then in her 90s. Emilie Howson was hard of hearing and so didn't attend fellowships. She gave a check for \$50 regularly, though.

By 1954, the Unitarian Fellowship of Austin had grown sufficiently strong to call its first minister and become incorporated as the First Unitarian Church of Austin. The Austin Women's Alliance had held its founding meeting before the Unitarian Fellowship had become a church and was extremely active, donating equipment to the church and granting scholarships. There were 66 families in the new church, with 81 members. Rev. George Marshfield of Ottawa Canada became the first settled minister in December of 1954. He was instrumental in starting the Public Affairs Forum, which has brought in a huge variety of speakers over the years and has been a lasting tradition in this congregation. By 1955 there were 112 members, and 78 children in the religious education department. Phyllis McMillan was Religious Education director from 1958-1965, and in 1954, Janet McGaughey became Music Director and permanent pianist. The Choir was started that year as well and has made a tremendous contribution to our worship services over the decades. They have performed "in concert" for fund-raising and other events - like the Renaissance dinners that were held in the late 1970s and the ice-cream socials of the early 1980s. The bookstore was started in 1956.

Rev. Marshfield resigned in October 1957 and Rev. Brandoch Lovely became our next minister in 1958. He is credited with much of the initial growth of the church in these early years. It was also in this period that Emilie Howson, died (1957), leaving the church a legacy of over \$100,000. Her gift took the congregation by surprise. First Unitarian Church of Austin's leadership decided to put the money into a church building, and our current site was purchased at 4700 Grover Avenue at a cost of \$20,000. The church was constructed and the parking lot was paved at a cost of \$86,100.

Emilie Howson also left significant sums of money to the Austin Library, and the American Unitarian Association. Other charities included the Austin Women's Club, Boys' Ranch near Amarillo, the Howson Nursery, and the Community Welfare Association in East Austin (renamed Howson Community center for the

gift, closed 2014). Emilie Howson was keen on education and reading, observing the inequity in society, she funded the purchase of school books for the East Austin library, and provided money via the Howson Daycare so that Black women could participate in the workforce. Community leader, Mattie Ella Homan Durden, brought that vision into reality.

Church school and church services were held at the Rosedale School during construction. On January 24, 1961, the new church building, Howson Hall, was dedicated.

In the early 1960s part-time salaries began to be paid to the Religious Education Director, Choir Director, and Church Pianist. The Heritage Club, a completely independent book discussion group (“but you don’t have to read the book”) began in 1960. John Sanders started as Church Pianist in 1963 and maintained that role through the 1990s. Janet McGauhey remained Music Director.

Rev. Charles A. Howe became our next minister, serving from 1966 to 1970. The Religious Education wing was added in 1967, doubling the size of the building. Archival anecdotes indicate that there was controversy within the city about the new RE wing, likely due to the fact that First UU partnered with All Austin Cooperative Preschool to house Austin’s first integrated preschool outside of East Austin.

In 1966, the first Bazaar, Dinner, and Auction was held. It was a great success and was repeated for many years, always a big fundraiser and fellowship opportunity for members. Variations on this concept have continued throughout the years in this congregation.

Church members in 1960, fueled by Austin High School’s decision to disallow Black students from participating in the Senior Picnic at Barton Springs pool, helped stage “swim ins” at Barton Springs Pool. Austin High student, Joan Means Khabele was the first Black person to defy Barton Springs’ unjust segregation laws. Allies like First Unitarian would go to the pool with young Black people, defying the authorities and complicating their efforts to keep the kids out. This led, peacefully, to the desegregation of Austin pools well before it became a national thing.

In 1971, our next minister, Rev. George K. Beach (1971-1978) joined the church. Membership rose from 202 families to 250 families by the time he left. The Beaches began the custom of welcoming people to Thanksgiving Dinner at their

home, and as this practice grew it moved to the Church to accommodate more people. Ever since, it's been a much-anticipated tradition enjoyed by many church members and friends.

In 1973, the Sunflower outreach program began. It met with various focus themes including personal growth workshops, coffee-house poetry and music gatherings, and discussion groups on Sunday evenings for about 20 years. This congregation is known for its rich tapestry of discussion and spiritual awareness groups.

LAGU (Lesbian and Gay Unitarians) was first started in the mid-1970s and has continued here in various forms over the years. In 1971 First Unitarian Church of Austin hosted the Texas Gay Liberation Front's Texas conference in Howson Hall, according to Dennis Paddle and Mike Harris, LGBTQ Austin elders. There were over 400 delegates to the convention. The Unitarian sponsored group, Interweave, evolved from LAGU in 1992, and our church became a Welcoming Congregation (welcoming to LGBTQ folks) in 1994 thanks to the efforts of long time member, Margaret Nunley. Margaret also sponsored Lesbian Dance Nights in Howson Hall in the 1980s-90s. These dances are fondly remembered by so many women in the Austin LGBTQ community who were grateful for a safe, welcoming, and smoke-free place to socialize.

In 1988, First UU was approached by a handful of gay men who hoped to form a gay chorus. This was a tough time to start a gay organization due to society's hostile feelings about gay people in the midst of the AIDS epidemic. The group called itself the Capital City Men's Chorus to sidestep the stigma. First UU offered the group its first performance space, free of charge, and did so into the mid-1990s when the organization outgrew our facilities. It is now known as the Austin Gay Men's Chorus. In October of 2022, this congregation was proud to welcome AGMC back to First UU by hosting their first fundraiser concert event. AGMC awarded First UU its "Certificate of Honor" recognizing this congregation for the role it played in launching what is now one of Austin's most well-established performing arts organizations.

In the 1980s, the concept of "voting member" was defined as members who had made a financial contribution to the church. This made it difficult to count members since not everyone who signed the membership book is a voting member. In 1980 there were 210 voting members, while a 1982 newspaper article attributed 400 members to the church.

Howson Hall, First UU's current fellowship hall, was previously the church's sanctuary. It was becoming very crowded by the mid 1980s, but then a sizable financial gift from members Everett and Marguerite DuPuy allowed for the start of a capital fund drive to add this new sanctuary to the existing property. Architect Joe Stoeltje was selected for the project and the new sanctuary was dedicated in January of 1988. Of particular note is the flaming chalice symbol architecturally incorporated into the wall of the dias. Church records say that Joe Stoeltje received national recognition for this use of the design.

Members Kent Kennan, Danielle Martin, Music Director Janet McGaughey, (all were faculty of UT's Butler School of Music) had a great passion for music and were committed to ensuring that the new sanctuary was impeccably well-designed for music. Notice that our sanctuary has no parallel walls and that the ceiling at the dias is higher than at the entrance to the sanctuary. The floor is uncarpeted, and there is a cork-like material on the wall above the back (entrance) wall. These features contribute to the space's remarkable acoustics. When the sanctuary was expanded in 2018, a special audio consultant was employed to ensure continuation of the marvelous acoustics.

Matthew B. McNaught was the minister from 1979-1988. In 1984, a new UU fellowship was started in Austin. This same year, the Women's Spirituality group was formed with about 30 women attending. This group has continued throughout the years, and now holds annual retreats at U-Bar-U Camp & Retreat center.

Metropolitan Community Church (Austin fellowship) got started on Saturday evenings at First UU around 1990, until they acquired their own building on Oltorf Street. They are now in South Austin and are called upRising Church of Austin. MCC is a Christian denomination that ministers to LGBTQ folks. Many early MCC fellowships around the country were given worship space by UU churches.

After Rev. McNaught's departure in 1988, two interim ministers, Josiah Bartlett and David Scheyer, served until W. Fred Wooden (1990-1994) was called as settled minister. Rev. Wooden made contact with our partner church in Feketehalom, Romania. Gifts were exchanged between the congregations, and First UU even held a Romanian Festival to celebrate the relationship. This congregation has sent money to Feketehalom as well. Church records say Rev. Wooden revitalized Amnesty International as well.

Interim minister David Scheyer went suddenly missing in 1989. He just didn't show up one day. They contacted his wife who was at a UUA meeting in Boston and she didn't know where he was. He turned up 4 months later in a homeless shelter in Phoenix AZ. They found a social security number with his name on it in his pocket. They traced it to an uncle of his in Washington state who identified him. He had amnesia and never recalled the circumstances of his disappearance, and never fully recovered his memory. It is believed that he retired in western North Carolina.

In 1989, Austin's first recurring music festival was established at this church. The Mostly Music Marathon was established to benefit AIDS Services of Austin and the David Powell Health Clinic, both serving the under-met needs of Austin residents living with HIV and AIDS. The event was founded by Danielle Martin and Ann McCutchan, with the assistance of Music Director and UT Music professor, Janet McGaughey. The Mostly Music Marathon was a staple of the Austin music scene from 1989-2004.

In April of 1993, First Unitarian Church of Austin changed its name to First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin. That year, we participated in the amicable creation of Live Oak UU Church, which was established to serve the growing population of Northwest Austin.

The Central Texas Quaker community passed the torch of stewardship and sacred trust for its 142 acre, beautiful Texas hill country ranch to First UU in 2001. Quakerland began in the early 1980s with the vision of a space where Quakers could find quiet, community, and refreshment for the spirit. By the end of the 20th century, the Quakerland Community found that they no longer had the resources to turn their vision into practical reality. The Quakers began a deliberate search for a successor steward for their sacred place. After serious due consideration on both sides, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin was selected as the eventual recipient of this wonderful gift.

After much thought and planning, in the summer of 2001, First UU accepted the Quakerland property in trust for the larger Unitarian Universalist community. The Unitarian Universalist Friends Retreat Foundation, a Texas nonprofit corporation, was created to hold title and operate the property as a spiritual retreat Center, thus becoming U-Bar-U Camp & Retreat center.

Charter member of First UU, composer, author, and UT professor, Kent Kennan, gave First UU its beloved Steinway piano as a legacy gift to the congregation upon his death in 2003. According to Steinway records, this instrument was built

in 1969. It has a remarkable voice and is well-known in Austin's music community as the finest piano (or one thereof) in the city. Its rich, bright tone, with the fine acoustics in the sanctuary, make performing on this piano a real treat for any pianist. First UU has kept this instrument well maintained thanks to a stipend also bequeathed by Professor Kennan. Brent Baldwin, our Director of Music since 1999, was recipient of the Kent Kennan scholarship during his educational career at the UT School of Music. Brent is presently the longest serving First UU staff member.

Date founded: 1/24/1961

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

1892

In this year the Unitarian Society of Austin was established by the Reverend Edwin Miller Wheelock, a Harvard-educated Union Civil War chaplain who settled in Austin after the war. Wheelock served as minister until 1899. He died in 1901.

1916

After Reverend Wheelock's death, organized Unitarianism in Austin fell into decline. Some former members met in various locations over the years and became known as the Community Church of Austin. An attempt to formally reorganize failed, although in the 1920s and 1930s, a small group of people in sympathy with liberal religion met in a rented upstairs room near the Capitol.

1951

This was a landmark year for Unitarians in Austin. In April 1951, 11 people from six families met in the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Kuhatschek to form the Unitarian Fellowship of Austin. Eventually when they outgrew members' homes, they moved to the YWCA administrative offices on Brazos Street, then in 1953 moved to the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs on San Gabriel Street.

1954

In May 1954, the Unitarian fellowship applied for church status with 66 member families. Shortly thereafter, the fellowship was given full church status and called its first full-time minister since Edwin M. Wheelock: Reverend George Marshfield of Ottawa, Canada.

1957-1967

Mrs. Emily Wheelock Howson, daughter of the founder of Unitarianism in Austin, died in 1957 and bequeathed \$100,000 to the Unitarian Church "with -out conditions:

Our present land site was purchased and the original church wa built with the generous donation. The first sanctuary was built, which is now Howson Hall. The original church building was dedicated on January 1961, the year that the American Unitarian

Association merged with the Universalist Church of America. In 1967, the religious education wing was added.

1988

By the 1980s, the church was overcrowded due to increased membership. Another sizable donation was given by Everett and Margaret DuPuy, enabling a capital fund drive that culminated in the addition of our present sanctuary, which was dedicated in 1988. The Alternate Space Gallery was also remodeled at this time, and it continues to serve as a venue for artistic displays, receptions , and meetings .

2009-2010

During these years of trouble and great change, the church engaged in extensive searching of its soul; to better understand the role of the church and the UU faith in the lives of its members, church community, and the greater Austin community of which it is a part. The process included leadership from its Board of Trustees, extensive participation of the entire congregation in focus groups, workshops and training with consultants. The process resulted in the congregational dismissal of Rev. Davidson Loehr.

After the dismissal of Rev. Davidson Loehr the congregation entered into two years of interim ministry. A large percentage of the congregation participated in much soul searching during the first year about who we were as a church and also dealt with the trauma of the dismissal. During the second year of interim ministry the congregation made structural changes resulting in a much healthier congregation ready to call a new minister. The changes include a new mission

statement, a set of values, a statement of the ends these values and mission were expected to achieve, and a covenant of healthy relations of members with each other. The Church also adopted a new policy-based form of governance.

2011-present

In August 2011, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin welcomed Reverend Meg Barnhouse as settled minister. In 2014 the church engaged in a capital campaign to expand the sanctuary. In 2018 we commenced renovations. Until the pandemic in 2020, membership grew to the highest levels that the church has witnessed in its history. Rev. Meg brought the congregation into a greater covenant and Right Relationship. She was bestowed with the Minister Emerita status.

The interim period after Rev Meg's departure has seen the continuation of Rev. Chris Jimmerson's tenure and skillful guidance from a team of interim ministers. We are currently in our second year of interim ministry. Our interim ministers have led the congregational in examining its history and facilitated several listening circles. The congregation's participation in these activities was enthusiastic. During this interim period, there has been incredible energy in the congregation and our membership is rising rapidly.

Ministerial History

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2023	Now	Interim	Michelle LaGrave	Co-Lead Interim Minister
2022	Now	Other	Chris Jimmerson	Co-Lead Minister
2022	2023	Contract	Chris Jimmerson	Co-Lead Minister for Values and Mission
2022	2023	Contract	Erin Walter	Assistant Interim Minister of Joy and Justice
2022	2023	Contract	Jonalu Johnstone	Co-Lead and Interim Minister

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2011	2022	Called	Margaret Barnhouse	Called Minister
2015	2022	Contract	Chris Jimmerson	Minister for Program Development
2019	2019	Other	Lee LaGault	Intern Minister
2017	2017	Other	Susan Yarbrough	Intern Minister
2012	2017	Other	Marisol Caballero	Assistant Minister
2017	2017	Other	Chris Jimmerson	Acting Senior Minister (6 months)
2014	2014	Contract	Chris Jimmerson	Assistant Minister
2010	2011	Interim	Edward Brock	Interim Minister
2009	2010	Interim	Janet Newman	Interim Minister
2000	2009	Called	Davidson Loehr	Minister
2008	2008	Other	Brian Ferguson	Intern Minister
2005	2006	Other	Amanda Beal	Youth Program Coordinator
2005	2005	Other	Jack HARRIS-BONHAM	Intern Minister
2003	2005	Other	Amanda Beal	Child Care Provider
2004	2004	Other	Victoria Rao	Intern Minister
2003	2003	Other	Hannah Wells	Intern Minister
2001	2002	Other	Catherine Harrington	Intern Minister
1999	2000	Interim	Clyde Grubbs	Interim Co-Minister
1999	2000	Interim	Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley	Interim Co-Minister

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
1995	1999	Called	William Zelazny	Minister
1994	1995	Interim	Oren Peterson	Interim Minister
1990	1994	Called	W. Frederick Wooden	Minister
1989	1990	Interim	J. Scheyer	Interim Minister
1988	1989	Interim	Josiah Bartlett	Interim Minister
1979	1988	Called	Matthew McNaught	Minister
1971	1978	Called	George Beach	Minister
1966	1970	Called	Charles Howe	Minister
1958	1965	Called	Brandoch Lovely	Minister
1954	1957	Called	George Marshfield	Minister

Ministers Emeritus/a

Name	Date Voted Emeritus/a	Year Deceased
Margaret Barnhouse	5/22/2022	

Additional ministerial history notes:

Rev. Davidson Loehr was dismissed by the congregation in 2009.

Rev. Marisol Caballero, who identifies as Latinx, was dismissed by the senior minister in 2017. This caused consternation among some BIPOC congregants.

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below comes directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2023*	\$764,512	\$1,147,644	456	177	
2022	\$673,268	\$1,066,075	451	183	
2021	\$701,225	\$924,901	553	191	
2020	\$711,450	\$996,498	608	218	366
2019	\$722,150	\$952,990	634	216	385
2018	\$775,000	\$924,443	648	228	402
2017	\$745,323	\$909,627	606	217	403
2016	\$674,334	\$921,217	578	221	401
2015	\$634,035	\$846,113	621	251	403
2014	\$555,000	\$747,000	535	92	384

The following notes and/or explanations have been offered by the congregation:

Year	Note/Explanation
2023	Our membership is increasing rapidly, and we are now over 500.

Demographics

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

10-24%

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

10-24%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

*Gender distribution (M/F/Other): 25/63/12%

*Race Distribution: ~80% Caucasian

*Geographic Distribution: ~90% live in the Austin area

*Length of membership: 27% over 20 years

**Non heterosexual: ~25%

_Data as collected through 2021 congregational survey

**Data as collected through 2023 ministerial search survey

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color?

5

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams?

4

What number of your Board of Trustees identify as people of color?

1

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to include the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership?

There has been a concerted effort to recruit more diversity for the board, staff and volunteer leadership positions.

Accessibility

Is your Congregation's meeting space wheelchair accessible? Yes

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? Yes

Resources & Programs

List the resources and programs your Congregation used or participated in during the past year:

Our church uses resources from WellSpring, Soul Matters, OWL and OWL Training, and The Commission on Institutional Change Widening the Circle of Concern Report. The church is also active with the Texas UU Justice Ministry. Delegates and non-delegates from the church attend the General Assembly each year and also participate in UU regional retreats to discuss the future of the RE program.

Describe your religious educational programs:

On Sundays, Children and youth attend RE from 10 to 10:50. Classes use curriculum from several sources and are led by volunteer teachers, and have an emphasis on play, student choice, and community building.

For the past few years, we have been using Soul Matters curriculum in all our children and youth classes. This year we are experimenting with different curricula written by UU Religious Educators. You can find more details on our website (link provided below).

Year-long programs for adults include WellSpring and covenant groups (including one for emerging adults) using Soul Matters materials. We also offer periodic short-term adult classes regularly, including in the last year -- Nonviolent Communication, Enneagram, Trans Inclusion, and soon, a class relating to money and stewardship. OWL is on a two-year rotation for children and youth levels and three-year rotation for adult levels with classes active for lower elementary and middle school ages now. There is also one all-ages service per month.

For additional details, refer to the Children and Youth program page:

<https://austinuu.org/wp2013/religious-education/childrens-programming/>

For additional details on Adult program, refer to the following page:

<https://austinuu.org/wp2013/chalice-circles/>

Surrounding Community

Describe the character of the surrounding community, including population and demographics:

The city of Austin is a rapidly growing community of about one million people. About 48 percent of the city's population identifies as non-Hispanic White, while about a third of the population claims LatinX ancestry and 7.8 percent identifies as Black or African American. An additional 7.7 percent is Asian. Most of the remainder claim two or more races.

The Capitol of Texas – as well as the Live Music Capital of the World – and home to the University of Texas, Austin prides itself on being “weird”. Its particular brand of weirdness is a combination of rebellious independence, rejection of conformity, and entrepreneurial spirit. Just over half of Austin's population has a college degree and nearly everyone (96%) has a computer in their household. Median household income is \$50,000.

Although most people in the city vote for Democrats and think of themselves as liberal, Austin is also highly segregated socioeconomically and by race/ethnicity. The city has an unfortunate history of violence against BIPOC and the pressures and benefits created by our current rapid growth are born unequally in our community. Housing costs are skyrocketing and our public transportation systems remain inadequate.

Describe how your Congregation is known/perceived by the larger community:

First UU Austin has long hosted a Public Affairs forum, which historically drew as many to our church on Sunday as did the Sunday service. Today, the Sunday service, including our strong music program, is the bigger draw. Nonetheless, many in the church continue to be deeply devoted to promoting social justice. We are often visible at political rallies at the capital, wearing bright yellow shirts reading “side with love”. We are also proud participants in the Austin Sanctuary Network and our members have played an important role in Travis county's extraordinarily high voter registration rate. Church also participates in Interfaith Action of Central Texas activities.

Describe your Congregation's religious, political, and social context from a historical and current perspective.

We are a religiously diverse congregation respectful of each others' varied beliefs. We appreciate thoughtful, uplifting, and challenging sermons that are interspersed with humor and joy. The social justice agenda draws many to our church and we are dedicated to becoming a welcoming church for all people pursuing a good faith search for truth and meaning.

The church adopted the 8th principle last year. We amended our mission to support our continuing aspiration to become a more diverse community so that it now reads “Together we nourish souls, transform lives, and do justice to build the Beloved Community”. At the same time, we amended our ends to “We partner with other organizations and faith communities to dismantle a culture of white supremacy and other systems of oppression, within ourselves, within our church community, and beyond our walls.” This is a place of growth that can sometimes be a bit tender.

Over the past decade we have grown and anticipating future growth we expanded our sanctuary in 2018. Disruption surrounding the renovation followed by the pandemic has us now smaller than we were five years ago and we have resumed our growth by continuing our strong programs in music, religious education, and social justice and by removing existing barriers to the participation of groups who are currently underrepresented in our community.

Position Basics

Anticipated Start Date: August 2024

Term: N/A

Percent Time: 100% Time

Minimum Salary + Housing: \$115,800

Benefits: Self-employment offset tax; Retirement Plan; UUA Health Plan; Other Health Plan; Disability Coverage; Term Life Insurance; Dental; Professional Expense Allowance

Questionnaire

Description of minister's role in relation to other paid staff

The Congregation operates under policy governance, and the Minister(s) serve as Executive Team, operating consistent with the policies, authorities, and limitations adopted by the Board. The Minister is responsible for ensuring appropriate implementation and management of policies regarding staff, including staffing practices, maintenance of all personnel records, clear and accurate job descriptions or other means of making clear each the expectations of each staff member, timely enrollment of eligible staff in offered benefit plans, annual compensation reviews, staff evaluations, and a dispute resolution process. The Minister has authority to hire, discharge, change the compensation of Congregational staff or implement other major personnel-related changes consistent with Board Policies.

The congregation is in its second year of interim ministry and has 2 co-lead ministers, the minister who served as assistant minister when Rev. Meg Barnhouse was our settled minister, and who is still on staff and an interim minister.

Primary areas of focus for the minister

The minister's primary areas of focus are:

- Leading Sunday services, including delivery of sermons
- Providing pastoral care to congregants
- Leading the congregation in living its mission, fostering a welcoming space, and building relationships with other churches and congregations
- Administering by developing programs and empowering those in charge and supporting fundraising
- Teaching about UU and other faith traditions' perspectives and supports RE programs for children and adults
- Representing congregation in greater community
- Setting social justice priorities

Desired strengths of the minister

We would like our minister to:

- deliver sermons that inspire the congregation to take action
- connect with and understand all communities within our congregation, including different ages, ethnicities, abilities, religious backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities
- build interpersonal relationships with congregants
- be a strong leader
- be a good administrator
- have a good sense of humor
- have a broad education
- be familiar with political climate of Texas

Ongoing momentum we would like to continue

Our minister should continue our congregation's:

- work to be welcoming to diverse communities
- social justice work, including in the areas of: immigration, reproductive justice, anti-racism, environmental justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, protecting and fostering democracy
- growth in membership

Programs and traditions we want to maintain

According to reports from the first two part-time Interim Ministers, the Rev. Jonalu Johnstone and the Rev. Erin Walters, who worked with the First UU Austin congregation from August 2022 to July 2023, the success of the music program, under Brent Baldwin's 24-year direction, demonstrates what long-term leadership can create. Emerita Minister, the Rev. Meg Barnhouse, who last led First UU Austin and is herself a musician, said she would always respect and defer to whatever Brent wanted to do with his music ministry. The amount of applause congregants give to musicians during services shows the success of Brent's music program; thus, the ministry must continue.

Rev. Jonalu and Erin also said Policy-based governance is working for the church with fairly wide acceptance, where it is understood. The committee and staff structures are less well understood, so when in doubt, people currently go to one or two points of contact – Rev. Chris (former Assistant Minister and current Co-Lead Minister) or Shannon Posern (Executive Director, previously Congregational Administrator).

The church has a strong social justice identity, grounded in its history from the 19th and 20th century Unitarians whose influence shaped the church's formation, through fights for racial integration and promotion of LGBTQIA rights. One of the most meaningful parts of church history has been the church clergy, Board and revolving lay led Social Action Committee's commitment to provide sanctuary for Sulma Franco, then later with Alirio Gamez, who both took sanctuary to avoid being forced to leave the U.S. with Deportation Orders. The social justice identity is reflected with community groups like the Foundation for the Austin Sanctuary Network, PFLAG, Texas UU Justice Ministry (TXUUJM), and others. Taking Monthly Special Offerings each month to support Social Justice non-profits further demonstrates the commitment.

Lay led work for Reproductive Justice and Green Sanctuary's Climate Crisis work continues; however, the Social Action Council is rebuilding to effectively engage and activate members. Some members hope to return to direct service efforts that previously provided assistance to community members as well as camaraderie in a common effort – tasks like feeding people and repairing homes for families with fewer resources.

While the Lifespan RE program has gone through many directors, members – parents and non-parents – universally praise current LRE Director Kelly Stokes. Children are included and celebrated in worship and Coffee Hour. The Story for All Ages is widely accepted as valuable to all congregants regardless of age. The monthly services of all ages is currently on hiatus, and we are looking to bring more creativity to these special services. The OWL program is acclaimed, and First UU is proud of hosting an OWL facilitator training with TXUUJM last fall, to support further OWL education across the state and beyond.

The congregation approved the 8th Principle in Spring 2022 and implementation is ongoing. The congregation expresses a desire to be multicultural and anti-oppressive, while individual white members often express either ignorance about what to do or a reluctance to make major changes.

Participation of children in the worship service, and the frequency of inter-generational services

The Sunday schedule for pre-K through 12th graders is as follows:

10:00-10:50 – Sunday School (aka RE classes) for PreK-12th Graders

11:00-12:00 – Worship Service

Families can all attend together. Children and youth can each decide whether to stay in the service or leave for playground time after the first 15 minutes. This includes the Story for All Ages.

11:15-ish-12:00 – Playground Time

After the Story for All Ages the children who chose to leave service are sung out to the care of our child care staff, who supervise them on the playground, where they can color, read, or play. They can be picked up from the playground when the service ends.

Middle and High Schoolers are welcome to hang or help out on the playground, if they'd like.

9:45-12:15 – Child Care

Babies, toddlers, and young preschoolers are welcome in the Nursery during any or all of the above activities.

Intergenerational services include but are not limited to our beloved annual Baby Parade at Easter, the annual Blessing of the Pets, the annual Flower Communion in the spring, the fall Water Communion Ritual and Ingathering, and the popular Christmas service with the No Rehearsal Christmas Pageant, usually held the Sunday before Christmas, and Burning Bowl, on the first Sunday in January.

We have experimented with having intergenerational services once a month, but have found they are not well attended by families with children. As mentioned in another response, these services are currently on hiatus, as we look bring more creativity to them. By moving RE classes before the service, we are making more space for children and youth to attend the services regularly, if they prefer, while also allowing parents who prefer to attend by themselves to do so.

Traditional holiday services celebrated outside of Sunday morning

Christmas Eve service.

Status of the congregation as a Welcoming Congregation

Yes, 1994.

Status of the congregation as a Green Sanctuary congregation

Yes.

Status of the congregation as an Honor Congregation

No.

Lessons the congregation has learned about nurturing ministers and ministry

Our most recent settled minister had a debilitating surgery with complications that forced her to be away from the pulpit for several months. Our assistant minister assumed her duties during this time. Congregants were available to help with transportation and meals and visits. Some of this time had been planned sabbatical leave. The Board worked with her to allow her to use other leave as well. When she returned to the pulpit, she had lingering mobility issues so adjustments were made for her to be able to do her job, including leading worship services using her wheelchair. Fortunately, the sanctuary had been renovated to make it accessible for people with mobility issues. The congregation wholeheartedly welcomed her back to the pulpit. In the early spring 2022, she announced that she would be retiring due to metastatic breast cancer. She created a team of 2 lay people and 3 staff to be available to help congregants process this devastating news as well as provide a cushion to shelter her from congregants offering her well-meaning advice. A congregation-wide celebration of her ministry was held upon her retirement and she was given the title of Minister Emerita.

How the congregation has evaluated its ministry and its history with ministers

Our Policy Based Governance Board monitors the performance of our minister and our ministries on an ongoing basis. The Board through its linkage function also conducts periodic congregational surveys to gain input about congregants'

satisfaction with our ministries. Evaluation of the church's history with ministers occurs during times of interim ministry, the most recent being reports generated by our interim ministers in 2022 based on input from the congregation.

Our most recent settled minister, Rev. Meg Barnhouse, was a beloved minister who retired from the ministry due to health reasons before she and the congregation were ready for that to happen. The settled minister prior to that was Rev. Davidson Loehr who was dismissed by a vote of the congregation. A very successful two year interim ministry followed his dismissal during which the congregation participated in much soul searching about who we were as a church. A new mission and values were adopted as well as a shift to policy based governance, resulting in a much healthier congregation ready to call a new minister.

The Ministerial History earlier in this document shows the tenure of ministers from the founding of the congregation.

What cottage meetings and surveys tell about the congregation

Through our cottage meetings (which we called "search parties" and "focus groups") and survey we confirmed that we are a congregation that is very driven by our mission: "Together we nourish souls, transform lives, and do justice to build the beloved community." We very much value our church community. We want to be nourished with inspiring services and sermons. We value social justice work and want that have the work grounded in spirituality.

We also learned that our congregants are very eager to have a personal relationship with our minister. And, we want to have a congregation that is diverse in every way. Also, our congregants are full of ideas and suggestions and want to share them.

The work that the minister(s) is expected to do on their own

The minister is expected to provide religious and spiritual leadership and historical and theological perspective. The minister is in charge of Sunday services, memorial services, weddings and other rites of passage. The minister provides spiritual guidance and pastoral care counseling to individuals.

First UU is a policy-based governance church. The minister serves as the Executive and in so doing, assists with setting and implementing the congregation's mission and overseeing the congregation's programs. The minister

is accountable for the hiring, supervision and dismissal of staff, the coordination and oversight of ministry teams and volunteers and is accountable for the business affairs and day-to-day operational and fiscal matters of the church.

The work that the congregation is expected to do on their own

The congregation is expected to share their time, treasure and talents through pledging to the annual stewardship campaign and contributing to other funds, leading and serving on ministry teams and committees and volunteering in a variety of other ways. Members of the congregation are elected to serve on the Board of Trustees to develop policies, monitor the performance of the minister and ministries of the church and maintain linkage with the congregation.

The work of the congregation and minister(s) that is shared by both

The congregation and the minister work together to live our mission to nourish souls, transform lives and do justice to build the beloved community. Volunteers, including lay leaders, musicians and ushers and the tech crew assist the minister with Sunday services. Lay pastoral care leadership works closely with the minister to meet the caring needs of the congregation. The Board of Trustees works closely with the minister who is accountable to the Board for the reasonable interpretation of and compliance with Board policies.

The congregation and the minister are committed to addressing the systemic prejudices and biases found within all parts of society. This work includes ensuring that the minister(s), staff, and members are trained to understand, welcome, and better serve an increasingly diverse community. The Board and minister will continually address the ways that systems of oppression within and beyond our congregation are perpetuated and agree to collaborate on a joint process of reflection to ensure progress. This includes, but is not limited to, the ways in which the characteristics of dominant cultures live in our practices, systems, procedures, and lives.

Work of the congregation done by other staff

Church staff are in charge of music selections and performance for Sunday services, directing the adult, children and youth choirs, planning the curriculum for Lifespan RE, recruiting and training RE teachers, coordinating OWL classes, planning and coordinating classes for potential new members, managing the

church budget, paying bills, creating the annual budget, managing the building facilities, arranging for facilities rentals, managing the church website and managing communications, serving as office manager, and overseeing kitchen and fellowship hall hospitality on Sunday mornings and for special events, including memorial service receptions.

Description of a typical Sunday at the congregation, including a typical Sunday worship service

RE classes for pre-K through 12th graders are held prior to the worship service.

Congregants gather before the service, including some who gather in our fellowship hall for coffee, bagels and other snacks. Prior to the pandemic when we had 2 worship services, people who attended the early service could also enjoy “Martha’s Free Tacos.” Many people hope that tradition of offering free breakfast tacos, made possible by an unrestricted bequest by an eponymous donor, will continue. We have recently organized welcome teams to be more proactive in welcoming visitors.

The typical order of service, for several years, has been:

Gathering the Community

Prelude

Welcome by minister/service leader

Lighting the Chalice/Words in unison, led by the lay leader

First hymn

Connecting to Our Community

Reading/Affirming our mission statement together which is on the wall in our Sanctuary

Anthem performed by our choir or other musicians

*Story for All Ages, usually read by our RE Director

Meditation on Breathing (singing the children out to their classes)

Centering and Commitment

****Centering and Meditation**

Candle-Lighting (votive candles are arranged in 2 places in the sanctuary for congregants to use to bear witness to their own or others' sorrows, joys and concerns)

Reading (by the lay leader)

Sermon (by the minister/service leader)

Second hymn

Offertory

Announcements

Extinguishing the Chalice/Words in unison led by the lay leader

Benediction (by the minister/service leader)

Postlude

*Quote from our recent Congregational Survey: When the Story for All Ages starts, the kids run up with obvious delight. You cannot fake that, or buy that

**In order to promote a culture of caring in our congregation, the minister has begun naming congregants who are willing to have their sorrows, joys or concerns shared during this part of the service.

This order of service is in the process of being updated.

While most congregants attend service in the sanctuary, some congregants choose to remain in the fellowship hall, where they can watch the service on TV monitors while having coffee and snacks.

Many congregants return to our fellowship hall for more coffee, bagels, snacks and conversation. Recently the variety of snacks offered before and after services have been expanded to accommodate dietary restrictions/preferences of our congregation, including vegan and gluten free.

Occasional Adult RE classes occur in the afternoon.

How the congregation defines good preaching and worship

We want preaching that inspires us to action, but is grounded in spirituality. We want preaching that draws on a variety of spiritual sources. We want our minister to know when their preaching should challenge us and when we need to be comforted.

Our service itself should inspire us. And often the music at First UU is a source of inspiration and nourishment. Our service should recognize the diversity, in all aspects, including religious or non religious backgrounds of our congregants.

Things a prospective minister should know about the theologies of the congregation, including where to find inspiration, comfort, and conflict

We have no one theology. We have atheist, humanists and agnostic congregants. We come from a variety of religious backgrounds. While we want spiritual guidance, some of us are put off by god language. Some of us have been traumatized by the religion we were raised in. The same phrase could both inspire or comfort some congregants and upset or cause conflict in other congregants.

We find comfort in our community at church. We find meaning in our social justice work, but some congregants feel that the sermons they hear are too political.

An equal number of survey respondents believe that changing our worship service would be upsetting as believe the change would be energizing.

Ways the congregation handles conflicted situations

The congregation has a Covenant of Healthy Relations and a 3-member Healthy Relations Team that promotes the covenant and advises on its use. The team also works with congregants, upon request, to resolve conflict. The Healthy Relations team has proposed an update to the covenant to make it more inclusive and in line with the 8th principle which First UU has adopted. The update will be voted on by the congregation in an upcoming congregational meeting.

The Board addresses processes for addressing conflict in several ways in its governing policies. This includes treatment of congregants, friends and visitors and treatment of staff in the Executive Limitations it set for the Executive. The Board has created in its policies a Board Code of Conduct that it adheres through its Covenant. The Board has also established a Complaint Processing Procedure and a Complaint Resolution Procedure explained in detail in the board governing policies

Role of music and the arts in the life of the congregation

Many respondents to our recent Congregational Survey referred to the music offered during our worship service as meaningful, nurturing and transformative. We have a long time very talented and beloved Music Director and an Assistant Music Director. We have a very talented choir and also bring in many guest musicians for our services. The congregation is used to hearing a very wide variety of music. One of the grand pianos in our sanctuary is considered the best concert piano in Austin. The church hosts frequent concerts only limited by the size of our sanctuary.

We have a space designated as an art gallery. The Gallery Committee arranges for artists from the church as well as the wider community to exhibit their art on a rotating basis.

The church has also had a community theater for a number of years that is part of our church ministry. Performances are held in our fellowship hall. The theater group, Paradox Players, had to go on hiatus during the pandemic and has not reorganized, pending the calling of our next settled minister.

The governing structure of the congregation and how the minister is a part of this structure

First UU of Austin is a policy-based governance church. The settled minister is designated through the church bylaws as the Executive. Leaders for elected board positions and the nominating committee are recruited by the Nominating Committee. The nominating committee presents a slate of candidates for the positions at the annual Spring Congregational Meeting. The bylaws stipulate how the nominating committee is formed and how it functions.

Various models for recruiting leaders for non-elected positions have been tried over the years. Currently, the Transformation Community Service (TCS) Team uses a process of structured conversations with new comers and others in the congregation who want to become more involved in the life of the church. Occasionally leaders emerge from these conversations.

Recent successful work of the congregation

We have had many recent successes at First UU:

- During our interim period we did an examination of the history of our congregation.

- In preparation for this search, many of us participated in the UUA's B4 workshop.
- Many of our congregants participated in the Trans Inclusion course
- Lobbying at the Texas capitol in support of the rights of trans youth and adults
- Provided support to a second person who had been in sanctuary at our church and had a deportation order and helped him obtain a work permit
- We've had concerted welcome efforts and grown attendance so that is now just over 500
- Hosted "Nurturing Harmony, Recovery, and Resilience in Gender Diversity," a workshop on trauma-informed somatic therapeutic techniques for transgender people and cis family of transgender people—led by a member of the congregation, thereby supporting the leadership development of congregants.

The work within the congregation which is slow, stuck, or not attended to

Some areas where we are stuck include:

Making RE a priority for all of the congregation not just parents of school age children

Making changes that make BIPOC folks feel that their needs are being heard (see more information about this in the reply to the question as to why people leave the church)

There is a sense within the congregation that we are not retaining members

Why people leave the congregation, and why new visitors do not return

From general interviews the Membership team shared that before the pandemic we had about 600 members but that membership dropped during the pandemic. Some people, moved, died or didn't feel connected with the zoom worship services. Today we're growing again and have reached 500 members. Some people have not officially resigned and have stepped back while First UU goes through the process of finding a new minister.

Some people had left before the pandemic. Some older people said the direction was too liberal and patronizing to some groups, and other members moved out of Texas because they didn't want to bring up their LGBTQIA children here.

From interviews with six People of the Global Majority (PGM) we learned that one former board member left First UU saying the congregation was avoiding conflict rather than addressing it and they had experienced too many micro-aggressions. Several POC and LGBTQI folks left the church when Latinx Assistant Minister Marisol Caballero was asked to leave by leadership. When PGM heard it was because of her relationship style, they said it looked like that meant cultural issues, which should have been addressed. Leadership said they couldn't discuss the problem because it was a private personnel issue.

A Change Team was formed with both (PGM) and White members. Eventually a couple of PGM left saying they were frustrated because when they reported people leaving because of micro-aggressions leadership said as white people they wasn't comfortable dealing with these problems, and micro-aggressions continued without being addressed. One white person on the Change team said they left because problems weren't being addressed.

From a couple of PGM's perspective one minister was trying to work with the conflict-avoidance but was then assigned to other duties. One other PGM said he left because the guidance wasn't based in spirituality. A PGM couple said they felt very welcomed when they first arrived and wore the handwritten red name tags, but when they joined and received permanent name tags the same people who'd been friendly to them previously quit talking to them. They also attended a Chalice Circle and said they felt uncomfortable in it and quit going because it wasn't a good fit. They suggested that facilitators need more training and shouldn't stay so fixated on the assigned list of questions. They needed flexibility to deviate from topics if participants showed an interest rather than having to move on to the next topic on a set list. They thought the previous RE director had some ideas to work on these problems but wasn't allowed to make changes and instead resigned abruptly.

In addition to these details, Interim Ministers Rev. Jonalu Johnstone and Rev. Erin Walters, who served from August, 2022 to July 2023, reported that the Healthy Relations Team, Membership Committee, BIPOC group, and a White Allies for Racial Equity group needed to be revived. (Since then, the Healthy Relations Team and a BIPOC group have been reinstated.)

The interim ministers also noted that work needs to be done on internal and external communications (that is, outreach, publicity and communication with the larger community). They restarted the Covenant of Right Relations and Healthy Relations Team that had begun during the last interim and continued during Rev.

Meg's tenure to provide guardrails to prevent and regulate conflict in the church. However, many members continue to avoid conflict, fearing that difference could erupt in unexpected ways. Not only does this feeling ground in recent history, but it's also a common sign of white supremacy culture, as described by Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones [<https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/comfort--fear-of-conflict.html>]. Conflict avoidance was seen in the reluctance of members to raise issues directly with leadership (including with the Healthy Relations Team), uncertainty around how to deal with conflict when it arises, blaming of anyone who names a problem, and the tendency for people with concerns to fade away and leave the church rather than work together toward solutions to problems. They suggested that in covenant, "we begin again in love."

They also reported, "Commendably, some issues were brought forward during the History Workshop that had never been so publicly named previously, including acknowledgement of the pain around Rev. Marisol Caballero's departure from her role as Assistant Minister of Faith Development and Congregational Engagement. We cannot learn from or resolve issues, or deal with the feelings around them, unless we are open about them within the church community."

In the interim ministry, the church and its leaders took a number of specific steps: Providing the presence of BIPOC ministers through guest sermons and in other guest leadership roles, Continuing to include readings, thought, story and music from a variety of racial and cultural sources in every Sunday morning sermon, First UU co-sponsored and eight members attended the Jubilee III anti-racism workshop last fall, 27 members attended the Trans Inclusion in Congregations curriculum, and Church staff also viewed and discussed the videos. Encouraging BIPOC members in lay leadership, Supporting revival of the BIPOC group, to provide support to BIPOC members and a place for our leaders to turn for accountability are also happening. A couple of strong recommendations included: Restarting and supporting an ongoing space for white anti-racism anti-oppression work so that white folks have a place to process the work with less potential harm and micro-aggressions to BIPOC members of the church, Engaging in the curriculum "Beloved Conversations," which approaches anti-racism anti-oppression work as a spiritual practice, through a personal and institutional view: <https://www.meadville.edu/light/fahs-collaborative/beloved-conversations>.

How money is raised within the congregation

The Stewardship Committee oversees an annual stewardship campaign in the fall. A weekly offering is also collected during worship services. The Second Sunday offering is divided among non-profit organizations chosen through a nomination and selection process that occurs during the annual Fall Congregational Meeting.

The church collects money through rental of its space, including classroom space rented to a private school and sanctuary space rented for concerts and performances and the fellowship hall rented for a variety of uses.

The congregation also holds a service auction as a fundraiser most years.

The most recent capital campaigns in the congregation

The most recent capital campaign started in 2014 and ended in 2020. The campaign was related to our building renovations, specifically expansion of our sanctuary and remodeling of our fellowship hall, kitchen, gallery and restrooms. Its goal was to raise \$3,000,000 and exceeded that goal by raising \$3,002,478.

Debt and reserves that the congregation has

We have a construction loan, the proceeds of which were used for building renovations. The amount owed as of our July 2023 financial report is \$1,080,000. The loan matures on 12/19/2038, and has an interest rate of 4.5%. Monthly payments are \$8,907.28.

We currently have a cash reserve sufficient to cover four months of operating expenses.

In addition we have the following reserves:

- Education Reserve: \$732,961.99 5% can be used each year for special religious education projects
- Murr Music: \$81,607 5% can be used each year for special music projects
- Permanent Endowment: \$289,395 may not be used until balance reaches 1,000,000
- Mixed Investment Savings: \$391,676 5.5% may be used to help fund the operating budget. Other amounts may be used for other purposes with a 2/3 votes at a congregational meeting. In no case may the fund be brought below \$250,000

The board called a congregational meeting in September, where the congregation voted to approve the release of \$106,887 from the Church Savings Account to make the upcoming 2024 payments on the church's construction loan, a loan necessitated after our most recent capital campaign fell short due to unforeseen costs. The use of funds from the Church Savings Account is a stop gap measure for 2024. The board is considering long term options including another capital campaign and/or the sale of some church property.

How the congregation feels about its stewardship

In 2022, the congregation experienced its most successful stewardship campaign in the church's history. There was only a net gain of 20 pledges, which indicates that the increase in pledges came from those who had previously pledged increasing the size of their donation.

While the congregation is willing to give money to the church, it is difficult to find volunteers to ask for stewardship pledges.

Role of the minister(s) in stewardship

Due to the church's policy-based governance the settled minister as the Executive has overall responsibility for the church budget. The minister or the minister's designated staff prepare the annual budget and work very closely with the Stewardship Committee prior to and during the Stewardship Campaign. The settled minister provides inspiration for pledging and arranges , with the Stewardship Committee, for Stewardship Moments offered by congregants during the worship services prior to and during the Stewardship Campaign.

The ten largest pledges within the congregation

The 10 largest current pledges are:

1. \$23,000
2. \$18,972
3. \$15,000
4. \$14,403
5. \$14,000
6. \$12,000
7. \$11,500
8. \$11,200
9. \$10,800
10. \$10,800

What a prospective minister should know about the building and grounds for the congregation

Worship space capacity is adequate at this time. As membership continues to grow, it is likely we will add a second service. The sanctuary is an attractive space since it was remodeled prior to the pandemic. Parking is usually adequate during the week. Parking spaces are supplemented on Sunday mornings through use of spaces at a neighboring credit union and school.

Office space is limited, partly because some office space is used by the school that rents our classrooms during the school year. This is partially addressed by allowing some staff to work from home.

The worship space is in good order. The RE wing has much to be desired in terms of aesthetics and adequate space as our RE enrollment grows.

Finding meeting room space can occasionally be a challenge due to demand. No space in our facility is devoted only to meetings.

Kitchen space is much improved since the renovations.

Our fellowship space is currently adequate. Our grounds suffered during the pandemic and the ongoing heat and drought.

The condition of the buildings and grounds

The congregation has a newly formed and very active Earth Keepers team that is engaged in revitalizing our landscaping that suffered a great deal during the pandemic when our facilities were closed and during the long-lasting heat and drought conditions we are currently under. A new Capital Campaign is in the planning stages. It might cover some costs related to parking, our RE playground and other parts of our church facilities that we were unable to attend to during our most recent campaign.

Expectations of the congregation for a minister(s) around pastoral care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation

The minister oversees pastoral care, providing pastoral care directly in many cases. The minister is able to delegate some pastoral care in the form of trained Pastoral Care Associates or other listening ministry efforts. The minister works closely with First UU Cares, the lay led caring ministry, to coordinate caring activities and to share congregants' needs as appropriate. Most of the home and hospital visits are made by First UU Cares volunteers. The ministers have begun a

practice of announcing congregants' sorrows, joys and concerns from the pulpit prior to the candle-lighting part of the worship service. This is done only with the permission of the congregant. The same information is shared in the weekly announcements, all with the goal of creating a more overt culture of caring at First UU.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around children and adult religious education

We have a part-time RE Director who supervises the RE staff. She oversees religious education for children, youth and adults. Due to our Policy Based Governance structure she reports to the settled minister. She also normally selects and reads the Story for All Ages during the worship services but occasionally the service leader (usually one of our ministers) will do so. We do not expect our minister(s) to be directly involved in the RE program. A minister can choose to teach an adult RE class but that has not been common in recent years.

In recent years our ministers have not had much direct involvement in religious education. They are usually invited to speak to the youth group about once a year, and some ministers have chosen to lead an Adult RE class that they're particularly interested in. These have usually been limited-series classes, lasting just a few weeks.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times

Our minister should be present at coffee hour after service and be available for conversations with congregants. Our minister should be familiar with, be comfortable with, and meet with the various communities (such as seniors, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, etc.) within the church and meet with members of those communities. Our minister should also be skilled in introducing new and existing members to each other.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around committee / task force work

Our minister is expected to provide leadership around which committees are needed. Our minister is expected to provide spiritual grounding for our committees' work. Our committees are lead by volunteers from within our

congregation but our minister provides oversight of each committee.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around leadership development

Under policy based governance, the minister is our Executive and hires and fires staff. We do expect that the minister will follow our policy regarding Executive/Staff leadership.

The leadership at First UU is often lay lead. Our minister is expected to work in concert with the lay leaders in developing church leadership. Historically, our minister and our congregation have supported seminarians that have been a part of our congregation before going to seminary.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around membership and membership growth

Our congregation expects that our minister will lead services that will attract and retain new members. Our minister will also empower staff and church leadership in creating vital programming for new members. Our minister will attend new member orientations and will welcome new members personally.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around staff relations and supervision

Under policy based governance, the minister is our Executive and hires, supervises and dismisses staff. We expect that our minister will follow our policy around Executive/Staff relations. And we expect that our staff members will be adequately paid.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around anti-oppression work / social justice / social action

We expect our minister to use the power of the pulpit to promote social justice and inspire us to take action. We expect our minister to provide guidance on specific actions we can take. We also expect that our minister will lead us in this work. We expect that our minister will ground our work in spirituality.

We expect that our minister will reach out to other churches and organizations to create coalitions for social justice.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around interfaith / community work

We expect that our minister will take the lead in reaching out to other churches and will lead us in working with community groups. We also expect that our minister will collaborate with community leaders and will continue our work with the Texas UU ministry.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around denominational activities

Most congregants are not very aware of denominational activities outside of First UU Austin, so they do not have an expectation around this. However, for those congregants who are very involved, there is an expectation that our minister will encourage congregants to attend national trainings and events. The minister is also expected to let congregants know funding is available through the church to support their attendance, if needed.

Any expectations there might be about a minister's family and personal life

This congregation has not had a settled minister with a family with school aged children in over 25 years. This is not to say we would not welcome a minister with a family. It has just not been a criterion. We have no expectations for the minister's spouse with regard to participation in the life of the church. One of our settled ministers in this time span had a spouse who chose to attend seminary and become an ordained UU minister. This decision was embraced by the congregation

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around other areas not already addressed above

The minister is responsible for structuring the Sunday service including selecting the readings, the theme, constructing ritual, any special activities.

How trust is built between the congregation and the minister

Trust is built in many ways including:

Transparency: the minister needs to communicate about issues and/or upcoming changes

Listening: the minister needs to actively seek out congregational input

Understanding: the minister needs to have knowledge of the various communities within the congregation

One on one conversations between congregants and the minister

Congregants feeling cared about and "seen" by the minister

One mistake a minister could make that would seriously affect the ministry

Some mistakes a minister could make that would seriously have a negative impact include:

- Not supporting our music director and the music program
- Deemphasizing social justice
- Focusing on preaching at the expense of other ministerial duties, especially pastoral care

In addition to the above, changing the format of our worship service would be viewed negatively by some congregants but welcomed by others.

How has your ministry changed since COVID began? Where do you see decline? What have you let go of? Where do you see fresh energy?

In March, 2020 the church facilities were closed due to the outbreak. Virtual worship services began. The church leadership worked very hard to improve these services over time. Virtual services continued as an option after the church facilities were re-opened and continue to this day. The church established a church Zoom account that became available for any non-worship church activities. It is still frequently used. The years 2020-2022 saw a decline in membership. The church is in a steady membership growth pattern in 2023. Pledging declined during the COVID shutdown but the 2023 stewardship campaign was the most successful in the history of the church. Many church activities had to be redesigned or canceled when the church facilities were closed. These are gradually being restored. We had two worship services for many years. That dropped to only one with the outbreak of COVID. We have not returned to two services yet but the sanctuary is full during the one service.

Have you passed the Eighth Principle, or is the congregation in process of moving to a congregational vote?

The congregation passed the Eighth Principle in 2022.

Describe trust in the congregation

Based on our survey results, focus groups, cottage meetings, there are no documented issues around trust. And anecdotally, there is not a sense of "grumbling" among congregants. Instead, congregants and leaders trust ministers who have been very communicative and transparent throughout the interim.

In addition, Congregants trust the board because they have made themselves available to chat and answer questions during the fellowship time after Sunday Worship Services. It has helped that they have also been very communicative and transparent throughout the interim.

Congregants do have questions about the ministerial search process, especially around having an inside candidate, but generally trust the Ministerial Search Committee (MSC) because they too have made themselves available to chat and answer questions during the fellowship time after Sunday Worship services. The MSC has also posted announcements in the Friday emails, spoken from the pulpit and then put all announcements in one spot on the website.

How did the last ministry end (or how is it ending)? How is the congregation doing with this time of transition?

The last ministry ended with the untimely retirement of Rev. Meg Barnhouse, our settled minister in 2022 due to health issues. After her retirement announcement, Rev. Meg organized a group composed of 2 congregants and 3 staff to serve as listening ears for congregants to express their grief and their anxieties. The Board quickly began the search for an interim minister that ultimately resulted in 2 part-time interim ministers. We have a full time accredited interim minister serving during our second year of interim ministry.

In addition to being in an interim ministerial period, the congregation has continued its recovery from the lengthy closure of our facilities during the pandemic. Despite these challenges, our membership is actually growing and outpacing many churches in attracting new members. The congregation also had its most successful stewardship campaign in church history in 2022. Although not all of the programs the church offered before the pandemic have been restored, many have and new committees have been formed. This includes the Earth

Keepers, formed based on our church values and UUA Principles, to revitalize our landscaping. The congregation has also launched a new effort to welcome visitors.

How is technology currently used in your congregation and what are the expectations of the minister around that?

Services are live-streamed, broadcast on television and held in-person. AV staff are available and the minister is not expected to handle any of the technology. However, ministers are expected to provide tech staff with text or images, if slides are wanted during the service. Video recordings and podcasts of past services are available. Sermons from 2000 forward are archived on our website. Our ministers have also produced weekly short videos for outreach to the congregation. Engaging in the church's social media presence is also expected.

Questions the congregation would have liked to have been asked which were not included here

There are a couple of questions we would have liked to have been asked:

1) What makes our congregation unique? Our reply would be, that we are very focused on our mission. It articulates very well the reason we belong to our church and many of us know it by heart. We recite it at the beginning of every service and it is written on our sanctuary wall.

Also, our congregation is an incubator for UU ministers, both parish and community. A large number of members of the congregation have entered seminary after either growing up in this congregation or joining the church as adults, including our current co-minister Rev Chris and last years' interim co-minister Rev Erin, along with three current members attending seminary in Austin to become ministers.

2) How many ministers will there be at First UU? Our reply would be that there will be at least two. We have had more than one minister since 2012.