

THE VOICE

Yearbook Edition - 2023 at Falkner Swamp UCC

(The life of the church in words and pictures.)



Reflection on 2023 from Rev. Frances

Dear Friends at Falkner Swamp,

For the first time in four years, my opening thought on the past year is not centered on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our church ministry. Hurrah!

Look Who Just Moved In

In 2023 we created opportunity and faced challenges. An opportunity I am deeply grateful that we seized is the \$30,000 loan from one of our Endowment Funds to Working Together, Inc. From their website, "Working Together ("WT") can be characterized as a self-help residential community for people who have hit bottom and have the desire to turn their lives around." The minimum stay for a student is 2 years, with most continuing for a 3rd, to build life skills and career competencies, learn how to form positive relationships, and accept accountability. Students leave able to live independently.

This 5-year loan is part of WT's fund-raising to open its facility, still slated for the future, and which is on the site of the former Fellowship Farm on Sanatoga Road. The loan pays an 8% interest quarterly for the first 3 years, then begins to pay back the principal over the last 2 years of the loan.

The opportunity rests not just in our monetary investment return, but in relationship capital. The founder of Working Together, Ted Edwards, and his wife Gina, have come to worship with us. We donated items that can be used on site. Future students will be our neighbors, perhaps guests at our Community Breakfasts, worshippers in our pews, partners in service. Rev. Ann Few's husband, Larry Ercolino, is listed on the website as "Director of GED Instruction." You can check it out here: <https://workingtogether.work/#discover-more>.

If Challenge is Driving, Opportunity is Riding Shotgun

Three large challenges in our midst are the ongoing steeple project, creating a more balanced budget, and managing the loss of our choir director/organist. We forged an agreement with engineer Marcus Brandt to continue tearing down the old and building the new. Our budget for 2024 is a much more realistic set of numbers after months of scrutiny, and raising funds and cutting expenses where we can.

The Consistory's appeal for a 10% increase in giving was delivered by Bob Schnaars during worship in December. See the text of his message elsewhere in this newsletter. Our counters have already seen an increase, and this is great, good news! The challenge will be to consistently communicate whether our income and expenses match our budget, or not.

In May we said a teary goodbye to Erica Creed, choir director and organist since March 2021. Erica's history with Falkner Swamp began when she was a senior in high school at BASH in the late 1990s. We have managed to patch together service music and our choir has stepped in beautifully with anthems and benedictions, under Bob Schnaars' direction. Rev. Ann Few assisted several times on piano and led us in new "Sing to the Glory of God" selections.

With an approved 2024 budget in hand, we can seek a new choir director/organist in earnest. Opportunity is rolling down her window and waving, so hopefully there will be good news soon.

Lent begins February 14, Ash Wednesday

With a nod to Valentine's Day, our Ash Wednesday and Lent theme is "Create in Me a Clean Heart," patterned after Psalm 51. On Feb 14 we will have a service in Fellowship Hall at 6:30 pm that includes the imposition of ashes and Communion, and Rev. Ann Few will lead us in music. A special Offering will be received on Ash Wednesday and the 1st Sunday of Lent for Church World Service. Feb 18, the first Sunday of Lent, is an Apostolic Sunday, and Susan Mercer will be preaching and leading the service. I am grateful for the gifts of our congregation and the opportunity to serve Jesus Christ with you, Falkner Swamp!

With you on the journey, Rev. Frances

February Voice / Yearbook 2023 Edition

Ministry “by the numbers” for 2023

Worship Services	48
With Communion	16
Pastoral Visits (in person)	34
Newsletter articles	14
Missions	9
Faith Formation session (adult/ Confirmation)	47
Funerals/Memorial Services	2
Graveside Internments	
Baptisms/Weddings	1 baptism
Pastoral Care & Counseling (phone, Zoom)	6
Consistory and Committee Meet- ings	32
Clergy Group Meetings (ie., Com- munity of Practice, Pottstown Communities of Faith)	16
PSEC Conference/Assoc. meetings	9
Boundary/Diversity Training (a 3- year cycle, req’d by Covenant Assoc..)	
Webinars for ongoing spiritual growth/church management	15
Education hours (req’d by Cove- nant Assoc.)	75.5
Other (i.e. other meetings not listed above, personnel management)	22

2023 Report for Consistory

Consistory had a very busy and productive year, meeting every month except July. First, as Ron Becker's term on Consistory has just ended, I would like to thank him for his service on Consistory; I would also like to welcome Vicki Fronheiser and Rob Krause onto Consistory. I served as President and Kim Shaak served as Vice President for 2023, and we will continue in those roles for 2024.

Consistory worked closely with the Property Committee to keep on top of the steeple project. We had several meetings with our contractor and expect the old bell tower to be removed shortly and the new tower and spire to be installed by mid-summer. We also worked with the Property Committee regarding the parsonage. We have signed on with a property management company to handle rent and coordinate with the tenants. We have also increased the rent to so it is more in line with the current market.

Consistory also oversaw the 2024 budget process. Please see the Budget Team report for more details on that effort.

Casey Fritz, Patty Fritz's son, created a short video about Falkner Swamp as a way of helping the community get to know us. You can go to Casey's YouTube channel, Keystone Curiosity, to find the Falkner Swamp video. You'll see some familiar faces and may even learn some new facts about our historic church.

We were given the opportunity to put some empty classrooms to good use as rented office space for two different companies, HDI, LLC, and Horrocks Fire and Rescue Apparatus. We are in the process of renting storage space to the Boyertown Area Choral Association as well.

We had one request for assistance from the Samaritan Fund and were able to assist that family.

We look forward to more community involvement and fellowship opportunities in the coming year, and we see a bright and hopeful future for Falkner Swamp UCC!

Yours in service,

Karen Miller

2023 Consistory Members: Ron Becker, Stacey Brennan, Lee Comer, Patty Fritz, Barb McDonough, Karen Miller, Doris Moser, Sharon Schnaars, Kim Shaak
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Property Committee Year in Review for 2023



We are proud to present to you some of the activities that our committee has participated in doing this past year.

- The oil tank that was no longer being used has been removed.
- The new door and window was replaced in the boiler room.
- Painting was completed in the Fellowship Hall and the back room.
- Painting of the old heater units was completed in the Sanctuary, the entrance and in the Fellowship Hall.
- The red shed was removed.
- The bushes and landscaping was trimmed around the church.
- The light fixtures in the sanctuary have been fixed; as well as other locations throughout the church.
- There were two toilets that have been replaced.
- Some of the former Sunday school rooms were cleaned out to accommodate new renters.
- There was a ground hog presenting problems and has since been removed.
- The parking lot lines were painted for \$300.
- Thank you to the Women's Ministries for purchasing and having installed new shades for the Fellowship Hall.
- The parsonage stove was replaced.
- There is a Management Company that is taking over the management of the parsonage property.
- The steeple in the front yard was removed.
- We are submitting permits for approval with the Township in order to move forward with the steeple completion.
- The anticipated completion of the steeple is during the summer (July / August).
- As always and continues to be, there have been many little repairs and preventive maintenance throughout the church that have been completed by the various committee members.

If you see any type of mechanical of problem at the church you should contact one of the property committee members so that we can be made aware of the problem.

We also had many members of the church that are not committee members participate in the repairs, and maintenance of the church. The committee appreciates and thanks them for their contributions.

For the upcoming year 2024, the following people are on our committee: Robin Zerr, Bob Erb, Bob Schnaars, Jim Kooser, Rob and Cameron Krause, Lee Heffner, Ron Becker and Kim Shaak.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin Zerr

Chairman

Falkner Swamp Cemetery Committee

Yearbook Report for 2023



The 2023 mowing season saw some complications. Spring was either flood or drought, our eXmark mower was in for service for a couple weeks, the cemetery's trailer was being used so we couldn't pick up the mower in a timely manner, once the mower was back personal schedules couldn't be adjusted enough to keep up with the mowing, our Spring Workday was a "no go" because the ground was too saturated to allow the tractor to pull the trailer full of topsoil through the lawns to level off the sunken graves, the old grass seed refused to germinate, and we couldn't put down new grass seed until the weather conditions were corrected ... all in all a pretty frustrating Spring.

In early Summer, Schiavo Asphalt Seal Coating and Line Striping seal coated our cemetery driveway and repaired the cracks with hot rubberized crack filler. The work was accomplished for the price of \$5,100 which was covered in full by the Cemetery Capital Fund.

We recovered by summer and the workday jobs were completed by volunteers on their own time. The professional landscaping company, Ivy League Landscaping, who have been doing all the trimming of the cemeteries since the 2020 season came to our rescue and took over the mowing of both cemeteries full time in addition to the trimming. We are extremely grateful to all our volunteers and to Ivy League for the complete turn-around in the appearance of the Hollowbush and Falkner Swamp cemeteries.

A reminder to members and family who decorate the gravesites: no glass may be used, and no wires may be used to hold grave-blankets or sprays to the ground. Glass breaks, and wires and broken glass can cause serious bodily injury and damage to equipment if they get propelled by trimmers or the blades of mowers. Thank you for doing your part to keep our groundskeepers safe from injury.

Lots are for sale in the Falkner Swamp UCC Cemetery. All lots in the Cemetery are sold in accordance with the provisions of the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Currently, prices for Members are:

1 grave \$300 2 graves \$500 3 graves \$700 4 graves \$900. We have pricing for up to eight graves. There is another tier of prices for non-members. You do not need to be a church member to purchase lots in the Falkner Swamp Cemetery. Copies of the Cemetery By-Laws are available at the church office during normal business hours. Purchases of gravesites are available by contacting Mary Ann Erb, Secretary/Treasurer.

Our thanks to Sharon Sgriccia for handling all of the cemetery inquiries and duties in regards to burials, paperwork and questions that come into the church by phone or in person. Your help is much appreciated.

The Cemetery Committee consists of eight members at this time.

Trustees:

Kevin Brennan
Sue Dickey
Mary Ann Erb, Secretary/Treasurer
Sharon Schnaars

Lot Managers:

Bob Erb, Sr.
Rob Erb, Jr.
Cameron Krause
Ed Thierolf

Respectfully submitted, *Mary Ann Erb*

In closing I would like to repeat part of a poster published by the 120-year-old Barre Granite Association in Barre, Vermont:
"...A Cemetery exists because every life is worth loving and remembering—always."

Music and Worship Report for 2023



Committee members: Robert Schnaars (chairperson), Sharon Schnaars, Rev Frances Chester, Brenda Becker, Fran Berkowitz, Arlene Butts-Umstead, Peg Heffner, Jim Kooser, Cassandra Krause

Beginning 2023, Cassandra Krause volunteered to take over training and scheduling acolytes as Becky Comer requested to step down. In March, Bob Schnaars obtained a banner from Signorama for our Easter services to be hung outside. He donated the banner – no cost to the church.

We had an Ash Weds service on Feb 22, 2023. This was held in the Fellowship Room and was well attended and received. Rev Frances used low lighting, which gave a relaxed and meditative feel to the overall service.

For Easter time, we had a Maundy Thursday service in which Bob Erb sang a solo. We also had the annual prayer vigil starting 12:00 PM Thursday thru 12:00PM on Good Friday. We did not have a Good Friday service in 2023. Easter was on April 9, 2023 and we had two services – one at 8:00AM and one at 10:00AM.

In May, Erica Creed gave the Music & Worship committee her resignation to be effective May 31, 2023. She was paid for services into June (vacation time). At that time, no other choir director or organist was available to take over, so we were on our own – until we could find someone. Bob Schnaars agreed to work with the choir until a new choir director is found, so that we can continue to have some music for our church services. He also worked out a way to download organ music for Sunday morning services, to be played through the sound system, so that we could continue to sing hymns each week.

As of June 2023, the congregation took a written survey, and based on the results of the poll it was decided that we would go to summer service hours. We agreed to try changing the hours from service at 10:00AM to 9:00AM. Earlier service would run from June 4, 2023 to September 10, 2023. It was also discussed that we would need to put out advertisements for choir director/organist and to review the contract prior to having a new person sign.

In July we were receiving feedback on the earlier service in which it seemed a minority liked the earlier time. The majority were pushing to go back to a 10:00 service. The idea of obtaining an outside digital sign was again discussed, but due to the high estimated cost, this idea was rejected. The cost was estimated to be \$30,000-\$35,000. Not doable at this time. It was agreed to skip an August 2023 meeting. On August 4th we welcomed a guest pianist/organist Chris Jackson – she agreed to play to help us out for that one Sunday.

As of Sept 10, 2023, we again started Sunday service at 10:00AM. This was Rally Day in which we held the service in the Fellowship Room following a potluck breakfast. This service and breakfast was very well attended. Also in September, we received a resume' from a possible organist/choir director, Liz . She provided this resume' for future consideration if our 2024 budget can accommodate her requested salary.

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Music and Worship Report for 2023

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Our October 2023 Anniversary Sunday was a standard Sunday. At the October meeting, Rev Frances decided that she wanted to start a “Grief Circle”, which would begin with All Saints Sunday or during Advent. She would also have a “Blue Christmas” service on December 6, 2023. This was done as the holiday season can be a hard time for some people who have lost loved ones, pets, jobs, or just having trouble during this season.

In our November meeting, Peg Heffner suggested we ask our congregation to bring in their nativity scenes which would be set up on the Fellowship Room for folks to see. She took charge of this activity, which turned out really great. It was like a nativity museum with many different and interesting nativity scenes. Peg and Lee Heffner also purchased a new Christmas tree for the sanctuary for the 2023 Christmas celebration. This was a donation to the church – a 9 foot artificial tree!

We also discussed that we would begin passing the offering plate as of November 26. Up until now, due to Covid, we had baskets at the exit doors of the sanctuary that people dropped their offering into. However, we are hoping that going back to passing the plates will result in more income for the church.

The person previously mentioned who provided us with an organist/choir director resume, Liz, offered to play music for our Christmas Eve service – and also to direct our choir for a Christmas Eve anthem. We eagerly accepted her offer. She was paid for her services (\$250.00).

In December, we did not hold a Music & Worship meeting. December was a busy month and we had a guest pianist come and play an anthem for one Sunday – Erin Ahart. We also had several Sundays in which Ann Few agreed to play music for the hymns on piano and organ. Cameron Krause – one of our young teenage members, agreed to assist with the service live streaming. He will run the sound system and the future live streaming. Bob Schnaars will continue to set up the entire service beforehand and will oversee the streaming / running of the services.

Christmas Eve fell on a Sunday in 2023, so we had a 10:00AM Sunday service in which the children sang “Friendly Beasts” with the help of a few choir members and the children’s church teachers. A 7:00PM candlelight service was also held that evening. Bob Erb & Erin Ahart sang two songs (Mary Did You Know and O Holy Night). Liz played the organ for hymns and she led the choir in singing the anthem (Were You There on That Christmas Night?).

2023 ended with our New Year’s Eve Sunday morning service - December 31st, which was led by Lee Comer. Rev Frances was on vacation.



Before closing, I want to note the following clergy filled in on services during Rev Frances apostolic and vacation Sundays: Rev. Paul Jones, Rev. Dr. Tyson Frey, Caroline Bashore, Rev. Angelee Benner-Smith, Rev. Ann Few, and Mike Todd.

Respectfully yours and submitted by:
Robert D Schnaars, Chairperson

Financial Appeal



Bob Schnaars offered this announcement during worship in December 2023. We are printing his message in our Yearbook for the benefit of those who were not in worship that day, and as a reminder of our church's financial needs for 2024 and beyond. Thank you for all you do as part of the body of Christ!

Good Morning!

This year the Consistory, working with the Budget Committee, has revamped the approach to developing a 2024 **balanced** budget for Falkner Swamp church. We did uncover some problems. Thanks to our treasurer, Vivian Wentzel, we have been able to see into the financial future of Falkner Swamp. Unfortunately, we learned that if we continue to spend as we are spending now without increasing income, we will run out of money within the next 18 months. The budget committee has been hard at work over the last several weeks asking the hard questions: where can we cut back on our spending and how do we increase the income.

The Budget Committee has taken several actions.

- We have reduced spending in most areas of our budget.
- We have rented a few of our extra rooms in the church building.
- We will increase the rent on the parsonage.

Frankly, this is not quite enough to get us to where our money coming in exceeds our money going out. So, this morning I would like to make an appeal to all the congregation. By the calculations of our budget committee, if everyone increased their giving by 10 percent more than they did last year the total amount of gain in finances would be greater than our expenses. For example, if you are presently giving 10 dollars a week to our church, make it 11. If you are giving 20 dollars a week, maybe give 22.

We recognize that not all congregation members may be able to afford an additional 10%. In these cases we ask that you do as much as you can reasonably afford. We hope that for most of us this will only be a minor sacrifice. It might mean a little more shopping at Walmart. It might mean you skip that Starbucks once a week. It adds up. Over the last 10 years the cleaning committee has saved our church a whopping \$67,000, just by having some folks spend a couple hours a week cleaning our church.

So, if it is at all possible for you to add 10 percent to your giving, thank you! This truly will help us to meet our goals and expenses. If this causes you stress and you can't make a 10 percent increase, it's okay. You are giving to this community by being a part of our church. Your time, your hard work, your talents – these, too, are important and appreciated. We can't exist without each and every one of you!

*Image courtesy of Vectors Tank



Budget Team

Our Budget Team was tasked with creating a realistic budget for 2024. After operating the last few years by dipping into our reserves, this group was determined to find ways to lower our expenses and increase our income to create a budget that allows the church to lean into our mission while still being good stewards of our resources.

The team that formed in September was significantly larger than any budget planning group we've had in recent memory, and I believe all committees were represented by at least one person. I cannot say enough good things about this group! We had four meetings of the large group, as well as many meetings of smaller groups with more specific tasks. Everyone gave so much of their time and energy to get the job done. Whether you came to one meeting, all of the meetings, or somewhere in between, thank you!

There was so much to do that Consistory requested that the Congregation approve postponing our annual meeting by two months. Thank you to the congregation for supporting our endeavors and giving us the time we needed in order to do the job right.

We just had our wrap-up meeting of the large group on Jan. 22. Many of us will continue to work in smaller committees.

We are creating three new committees to move Falkner Swamp forward:

1. Our new **FUNdraising Committee**, led by Rob Krause, is planning to hold several fundraisers this year to raise money and provide fellowship for church members and community members alike. Please watch for information and support these efforts.

2. Bob Schnaars will lead our new **Outreach Committee**, which will look for ways to engage our local community and let people know what an awesome family we have here at Falkner Swamp.

3. Our new **Stewardship Committee** hopes to plan a stewardship campaign for late summer/early fall to help us more accurately plan our 2025 budget. We will also look for ways to better steward all of our resources, financial and otherwise. Karen Miller will lead this group.

**If you feel called to join any of these groups, please talk to the committee chairs. We would be very happy to have you!*

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Miller

Join Us For The

Fastnacht Social

Falkner Swamp UCC
Fellowship Room

FRIDAY

February 9, 2024

7 PM

Old Favorites

Soon to become Favorites

Lots of Laughs

Donuts and Light Refreshments

FAITH FORMATION: YEARBOOK NEWSLETTER REPORT

Team Members: Rev. Frances Chester, Becky Comer, Susan Mercer (1/2024)



The Children...

Children's Church—the children come downstairs after their special time with Rev. Frances. We have been averaging 5--6 children each week. Our aim this year is to expose the children to key Bible stories and events from both the Old and New Testament. In September, we started our lessons with the very beginning of Genesis-The Creation Story. ...and God said, "It's Good!" From there we talked about the story of Noah. During the Advent and Christmas weeks, the children learned about the birth of our Lord, Jesus. They also enjoyed donning costumes of donkeys, cows, doves, sheep, angels, and shepherds as they enacted and sang the song, The Friendly Beasts.

The children truly enjoyed performing this song (twice!) for the congregation. Having members of our adult choir supporting them was so uplifting. And we are thankful to have Bob Schnaars and his guitar adding that extra layer to the performances. We will continue having the children celebrate their faith through songs.

A new component has been added into our schedule. Mrs. Jana Robbins takes the children downstairs on Communion Sundays- the first Sunday of each month. The children have the option to play, read, or do a craft which is presented by Miss Jana. The children are then escorted back upstairs to partake in Holy Communion. This added feature allows Becky and Susan the opportunity to be part of an entire service and refresh their spiritual needs.

Children Helping Children- The children enjoy passing those cans to those sitting in the pews. The monies collected are divided between our friends in The Mustard Seed School in Malawi and our nearby neighbors through Project 143. The children in the Bethany Home were very appreciative of the many gift cards we collected. Thank you to all!

Our Confirmation Class...

As a Faith Formation Committee, we double team, on a rotating basis, as we meet with our confirmand, Lucas. We are using the components of UCC's Statement of Faith in order for Lucas to develop his own belief foundation. He is learning key Biblical events, while extending his spiritual vocabulary, learning to become involved in the church through attending meetings, service events, and planning his own special project. Confirmation will be in May.

The Adults...

Rev. Frances continues to lead adults in Bible Study, set up on Tuesday afternoons, 1-2 pm. Discussions about the scriptures used in Sunday's service strengthen and offer the opportunity to share our relationship with God. All are welcome.

We look forward to continuing our efforts in support our members, friends and neighbors near and far.

In God's Love,

The Faith Formation Team



Women's Ministries

Women's Ministries Yearbook 2023

Women's Ministries meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 10 am. All women of the church are welcome to join.

Service to our church and community

- Provided desserts for Rev. Hauze's funeral
- Coordinated a Red Food drive for BAMS
- Donated 8 Easter baskets to BAMS
- Participated in the peanut butter egg fundraiser (mixing, etc.)
- Sent cards on various occasions to members
- Purchased and filled 10 backpacks for BAMS
- Sponsored "Operation 143" mission food project
- Purchased and had new shades installed for Fellowship Hall
- Monetary donations to BAMS and New Hanover Fire Company
- Sponsored a teenager for Christmas through BAMS

Social

- Ladies' Night
- Lunch and meeting held in June at Copperfield
- Breakfast at Sunflower Café in December attended by women of church

Fundraiser

- Sold 23 Christmas logs
- Sold wreaths
- Profit of \$440 was donated to the church

Members: Carol Stevens, Olga Rees, Eleanor Specht, Linda Sell, Judy Miller, Doris Moser, Ellen Whitfield, Joanne Lewis, Beth Reese, Susan Mercer, Barbara Geary-Secretary, Arlene Umstead-Chairperson, Sharon Sgriccia- Treasurer



Ladies Night

April 23, 2024

More details soon.

Falkner Swamp Reformed Church of the United Church of Christ

ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE – Yearbook Report for 2023

January 2024

Chair-Russell Miller – 2023

(Becky Comer took over as Chair in 2024)

Members: Lee Heffner, Deborah Lord, Russell Miller, Kenneth Berkowitz, Becky Comer

Rev. Frances Chester - Pastor

Defacto Consistory President - Karen Miller

Category A (Unrestricted Principal/Income)

Account #1 \$40,000 CD 883704-S1003 @ Citadel Credit Union
Rate 4.25% - Matures 10/8/24
Balance 12/31/23 - \$41,373.45 (+\$5.00 Savings Acct.)
Signers- Lee Heffner & Ken Berkowitz

Account #4 Statement Savings Account #20280 @ Ambler Savings Bank
Balance as of 12/31/2023 - \$51,095.03 (.5% interest rate)

Account X Promissory Note (Working Together) \$30,000 (8% Interest)

Total Category A - \$122,473.48 on 12/31/2023

Category B (Restricted Principal/Unrestricted Income)

Account #1 \$28,502.91 - CD 883704-S1004 @ Citadel Credit Union
Rate - 3.15% - matures 3/23/24
Balance 12/31/2023 - \$29,575.34
Signers - Lee Heffner & Ken Berkowitz
Interest to go to general fund annually & principal to be reinvested.

Category C (Restricted Principal/Restricted Income)

Account #1 \$2400.12 - CD 883704-S1002 @ Citadel Credit Union
Rate - 3.15% - matures 3/23/24
Balance 12/31/23 - \$2,490.49

Signers - Lee Heffner & Ken Berkowitz



2023 Breakfast Highlights

Last year we resumed our breakfasts at the church with resounding support from our congregation and community.

I would like to thank all of the many volunteers that helped to make the breakfasts such a success, without your contributions we would not have been as successful.

There were three breakfasts during the months of March, April and May.

Total profits for the three breakfasts is \$1,230.02. These breakfasts do not cost anything and are a free will contribution.

We averaged over 100 people at each breakfast that we were able to feed.

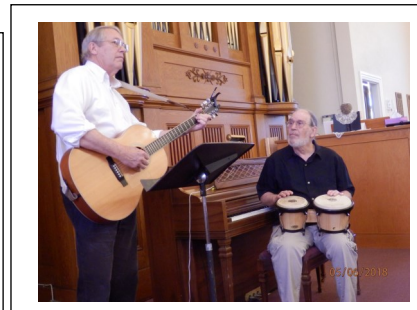
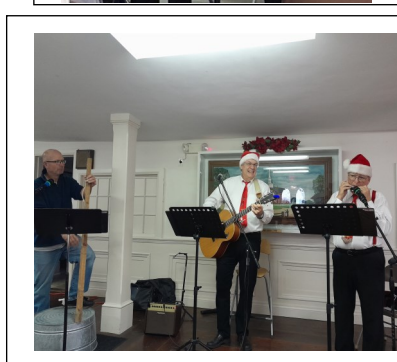
The community stores were extremely generous in their contributions; some of those stores are Giant, Weis, Walmart, Costco, Landis, Freed's and the Bread Barn.

We hope to feed many more people this year. We anticipate breakfasts to be February 3, 2024, March 2, 2024, April 6, 2024 and May 4, 2024. We hope that you can either come for breakfast or be able to volunteer. Bring a friend and spread the word!

Respectfully Submitted, Robin Zerr

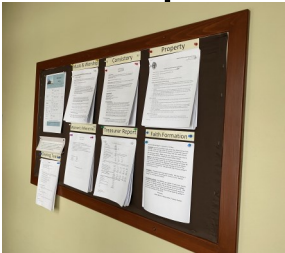
The Dogs of Falkner Swamp

The Dogs of Falkner Swamp didn't have any outside gigs for 2023. They were happy to perform as they were needed in the church, sometimes singing as "The Dogs" and sometimes as "The Dogs and Friends." The pictures below were from a couple worship services; they sang at our Community Breakfasts, the 2023's Fastnacht Social, but I don't have any pictures; and, Christmas with the Dogs and Friends.



Did You Know?

- **What happens to your written prayers from worship....** after praying them in worship, Rev. Frances pins them on the bulletin board downstairs. You are free to take them home as a reminder or keep them up. ALL are encouraged to look over the prayers to keep in heart and mind each week.
- **The most recent financials and committee reports** submitted to the church office are posted on the bulletin board outside the church office.
- **You can receive texts from the church** about Sunday happenings and other timely matters by signing up for Flocknote. Contact Sharon in the church office for details.
- **Collecting Crushed Cans for Cash!** Please rinse and crush your ALUMINUM ONLY cans for the church. A can crusher is available in the Fellowship room, on the window sill closest to the back stairwell. A blue recycling bin is placed to the left of the door leading to the cemetery, at the bottom of the back stairwell. Thank you, Rob Krause, for the idea and providing the bin, and for taking the cans in for cash. Thank you to Larry & Ann for donating the can crusher. Thank YOU reader and future can collector!



From the Church Office: Falkner Swamp membership statistics for 2023 [2022 in brackets]

Total Additions: 2 (2 new members) [11]

Total Losses: 1 (1 death) [2]

Total Membership as of 12/31/2023 84 [172]

Total Baptisms: 4 [0]

Average Weekly Worship Attendance: 47 (53 in person Sunday worships in 2023)
[41 (50 in person Sunday worships in 2022)]

The Samaritan Fund

By Rev. Frances



"I want you and your entire church to know how grateful I am for your support." The text came through a week before Christmas from Amy (named changed to protect identity), a woman who Consistory voted to help with back rent, from the Samaritan Fund.

It was early December. Amy was given notice from her landlord that unless she paid all back rent plus January's rent by Jan 1, she and her son would be evicted. Her son's school social worker was helping her apply for aid programs. She makes too much money for LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program). She qualified for \$23 in food stamps. Amy found part of the back rent money by taking from her 401K, but it was not enough.

Many questions lurk in our minds about Amy's situation. There is only so much information we can gather when time is of the essence. And our sense of judgement naturally comes into play. I spoke with the social worker also, which helped Consistory's decision to release the funds to her landlord. It's important to know that when we provide rent or mortgage assistance, for example, that the person on whose behalf we pay is able to maintain the housing going forward.

There's a sinister question behind this: if they cannot sustain the rent or mortgage, then where do they go? Rents are going higher, and higher. We, too, are raising the rent on those who rent the parsonage from us. We are still offering below what we could ask given the market, but it is a significant increase from the low amount we were asking previously.

From what we could gather, Amy is determined to move forward ensuring she and her son will be financially secure.

As I am getting this article ready for the yearbook edition of the Newsletter, another call came in from a social worker on behalf of her client, a 5-year-old boy. The boy's mother is single and raising her two children after ending a marriage with their father who was abusive. Another eviction notice.

Consistory is currently revisiting the Fund's protocol to ensure the process we follow enables the wisest decisions. Consistory will continue to review needful situations with head and heart, listening to Jesus' voice, "when you have done it for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me" (Matthew 25:40 CEB).

This fund was created by Consistory in April 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic. It was then and remains a fund that anyone can give to for financial aid to any who may have need.

To date Consistory has voted to offer funds on behalf of 6 individuals and 2 entities (BAMS, when fund first established) and to the Ashwood Fire Victims in September 2020.

The Fund currently has \$1,442 based on the December Treasurer report. If you feel moved to contribute to the Samaritan Fund please indicate "Samaritan Fund" on the memo line of your check or click the box when you donate online.

Spring 2024 Calendar

February 3—Community Breakfast from 8—11 AM (also March 2, April 6 & May 4)

February 9—Fastnacht Social @ 7 PM

February 14 —Ash Wednesday, 6:30pm Worship (CWS special offering)

February 18 —1st Sunday in Lent (Church World Service special offering), Apostolic Sunday, Susan Mercer preaching

February 19-23—peanut butter egg making 8:30AM—?

March 5— Dogs perform @ Church of the Good Shepherd—1PM

March 10— New Members' Inquiry Session, following worship

March 24 —Palm Sunday (One Great Hour of Sharing special offering)

March 28—Maundy Thursday (Church World Service special offering)

March 31—Easter Sunday (Future of Falkner Swamp special offering)

May 19 —Pentecost ~ Confirmation of Lucas Krause



The end of year financials from our treasurer, Vivian Wentzel, will be provided separate from this newsletter. A few hard copies will be available at the church.

OUR CHURCH'S MISSION STATEMENT (adopted 11/13/2022)

as printed in the Constitution & By-laws

We, the Congregation of Falkner Swamp United Church of Christ offer this mission to all members, friends, and neighbors near and far:

1. To be a place of welcome and a peaceful spiritual retreat for all of God's children.
2. To strengthen and share our relationship with God through the Holy Word, prayer, music, worship, and service to others.
3. To spread God's love by modeling our daily lives as examples set before us by Jesus Christ.