

NEWSLETTER YEARBOOK EDITION

2024 AT FALKNER SWAMP UCC

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



Reflection on 2024 from Rev. Frances

Dear Beloved of Falkner Swamp,

The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy. – Henri Nouwen

As I reflect on the past year at Falkner Swamp, I am filled with gratitude for the blessings and growth we have experienced. The introduction of three new ministries brings fresh energy and opportunities for fellowship and service. The Stewardship and FUNdraising Committees have worked diligently to support our community. The upcoming celebration of our 300th Anniversary reminds us of our rich heritage and enduring faith.

Please see the reports for Stewardship and FUNraising in this Yearbook. Note especially the need for volunteers for the April 26 Bazaar that the FUNdraisers are planning. Can you give a few hours of your time that Saturday? All will be set up for you; you just need to show up with a smile! The 300th Anniversary Committee meets in early February and will soon put out a list of dates to honor our church's first Communion on October 15, 1725.

One of my goals for 2024 was to train as a Field Education Supervisor so our church could receive a seminary student interested in interning with us. Kelly Johannsen, in her second year at Lancaster Theological Seminary (now affiliated with Moravian University), began with us in September and will continue through April. Her leadership in worship has and will continue to bless us. Another goal was to continue with the Confirmation of Lucas Krause, who, thanks to the clever, wise, and devoted teaching of Becky Comer and Susan Mercer, was confirmed in May.

Gratitude abounded for me in worship on September 29, when this congregation gave me a generous gift in honor of my 20th anniversary of my ordination, my "ordiversary," on October 3, 2004. I remain deeply touched by everyone's expressions of love for me that day. The close of 2024 included the memorial service on December 7 of Arlene Borneman Butts Umstead, our organist for 60 years and lifelong member, who died at the age of 92 in September. Her legacy of perseverance and deep faith in God and in people remain with us today, and we are stronger for it.

Looking ahead, I shared with Consistory and received their blessing on my goals for 2025: complete Confirmation with Lydia and Archie in the Spring; help prepare events and worship for our 300th Anniversary celebration; and actively seek a Choir Director.

None of these goals will be completed by me alone. To borrow from Philippians 4:13, *(We) can do all things through Christ who strengthens (us)*. Believe in this, and we will be the church God continues to form us to be: one body of diverse gifts from the Holy Spirit, uniting to follow the way of Jesus.

In gratitude and with love,

Rev. Frances

2024 Report for Consistory

Sometimes you don't realize how much you've accomplished until you make a list! Consistory was very busy again in 2024.

In January 2024, we welcomed Vicki F. and Rob K. as new members to Consistory. I want to thank Kim S. and Lee C. for their faithful service to Falkner Swamp UCC, as both have stepped down from Consistory. For 2025, we welcome Lee H. aboard!

Consistory reviewed and revised the criteria regarding requests to and disbursements from the Samaritan Fund in order to clarify a few items. We were able to financially assist one family in 2024.

Regarding our parsonage, we have hired a management company to deal with both the finances and the day-to-day items. We increased the rent incrementally to bring it closer to market value, and the current lease runs through March 2025. Our tenants worked with us and have remained in the parsonage.

We also renewed our leases with HDI, LLC and Horrocks Fire and Rescue Apparatus for the office spaces they are using on the lower level of our Christian Ed wing.

In 2024, Consistory approved three new committees: the Stewardship Team, the FUNdraising Committee, and the 300th Anniversary Committee. Stewardship and FUNdraising were in direct response to the budget crisis we dealt with at the end of 2023. All three of these new committees have BIG things planned for 2025 – I encourage you to watch for updates from all three groups so you can stay informed!

Consistory encouraged the church to participate in Off-Plastics October to find ways to reduce our use of single-use plastics. We were successful with a few of our ideas and won \$50 from the PSEC Climate Justice Team for the congregation's efforts. Thank you! The money was put into the general fund.

In an effort to be more focused, we have come up with some Consistory goals for 2025:

- Kitchen certification – this involves County permitting and will allow us to use our kitchen for additional events attended by the public
- Support the 300th Anniversary Committee
- Monitor giving to be sure we can meet our financial responsibilities and goals

We are also working to create a Safe Church Policy that reflects current practices as well as a Human Resources Manual related to onboarding and offboarding staff.

We recently implemented some new Consistory meeting procedures. We are tracking "Action Items" to make sure things are getting done outside of our meetings. We are also setting time limits for each topic on the agenda and putting non-agenda items that come up in a "Parking Lot" to be discussed at the end of the meeting or to be added to the next month's agenda. These new procedures have been very helpful so far.

2025 Consistory Members: Stacey Brennan, Patty Fritz, Vicki Fronheiser, Lee Heffner, Rob Krause, Barb McDonough, Karen Miller, Doris Moser, and Sharon Schnaars.

We welcome your input, questions, comments, and ideas. Please feel free to talk to any member of Consistory.

2024 Yearly Report – Property Committee



Some of the highlights from 2024 were the following:

- The steeple is an on-going project that will go into 2025
 - The steeple permit to make the repairs was approved.
 - Many of the louvers have been hand made and painted by members of the church.
 - A lot of behind-the-scenes work has been completed to move the project forward.
- An on-going project has been to clean out and organize the attic; removal of items such as chairs, flowers, ornaments, etc.
- The first aid kits have been updated with fresh supplies.
- The light post outside has been worked on by Michael; Bob and Sharon's son.
- All the bathroom lights now have motion lights installed.
- The pole outside of the door by the cemetery has been repaired. We had a problem with a woodpecker that was causing damage.
- The light for the bulletin in the fellowship hall has been fixed.
- We have an exterminator that comes out quarterly for bugs and pests; we also have someone to come out and take care of the bats in the attic as well.
- Casey has been taking the trash out every Thursday for the Friday pickup for this past year.
- We currently have a property management company that oversees the parsonage rental.
- Due to having tenants we are required to have snow removal of the parking lot and sidewalks.
- Some window frames have been painted.
- The heaters that were installed previously which left the walls needing to be repaired have been painted.
- There are many other repairs that have been completed throughout the year.

Thank you to the members of the property committee for their efforts throughout the year. The members include Bob Erb, Bob Schnaars, Jim Kooser, Lee Hefner, Ron Becker, Rob and Cameron Krause, Kim Shaak and Robin Zerr.

During 2025 if someone is aware of repairs that are needed they can approach the members and it can either be repaired or discussed at one of our meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Zerr

Falkner Swamp Cemetery Committee



Cemetery Yearbook Report for the year 2024

Early in January, the committee was considering an individual for mowing the Falkner Swamp Cemetery. In previous years the cemeteries were mowed by various members of the Erb family, with Ted Reese voluntarily mowing the Hollowbush Cemetery for 2022, and Corrie Shaak mowing the Falkner Swamp Cemetery for 2022 and the beginning of the season for 2023. Ivy League Landscaping took on the mowing of both cemeteries in 2023, in addition to doing all the trimming of both cemeteries, all of which was done very well, but at a great cost to the church budget. In the hopes of lowering our costs, we tried recruiting individuals to again take over the mowing, but the obstacles were too numerous to overcome, personal insurance being the most onerous.

One of the scariest problems the cemetery encountered this year was to find that our church insurance company [LMK] had somehow omitted the Falkner Swamp Cemetery from the church's policy. This error was found while we were trying to deal with the mowing situation. The last year the cemetery was listed on the church's policy was 2020 and then ... poof it was gone. This was corrected on July 15, 2024, when we received a Package endorsement that added the Cemetery and two buildings (gazebo and shed) to the insurance policy effective June 19, 2024. The re-addition of the cemetery back on the policy generated an additional premium of \$434.00 for the current year. Our thanks to Sharon Schnaars for her timely interception of the omission, and her quick work to affect its correction!

Another issue that has been overcome this year is the lack of personnel to mark the grave sites for burials. With the addition of Kevin and Stacey Brennan to take on the marking of grave sites for the Falkner Swamp Cemetery we are confident that all will run smoothly. A very heartfelt **"thank you"** to Kevin and Stacey for volunteering to do this job. Without someone knowledgeable in charge of marking new grave sites, and identifying the placing of tomb stones, the cemetery would operate in crisis mode.

The Cemetery and Property Committees again joined forces for a workday on April 20 from 9 am to 12 noon, which was followed by a lunch provided by Robin Zerr. Thank you to everyone who helped in any way and for whatever period of time you could donate. Without our church members and friends giving so freely of their valuable time and resources our cemeteries, buildings and grounds would be in terrible shape. In addition to our workday, Bobby Marriott again used his tractor and farm chopper to mow down the weeds and small trees growing on the back field portion of the Falkner Swamp Cemetery. Bobby has graciously done this job each year to keep the field from reverting to "wild" growth.

There were six burials of cremains this year: Ann M. and Edwin L. Hill, Mary E. Baird, and Linda M. Rennard in the Falkner Swamp Cemetery; and Arlene K. Butts Umstead and Charles R. Butts in the Hollowbush Cemetery.

There are lots 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. Copies of the Cemetery By-Laws are available at the church office during normal business hours.

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

The Cemetery Committee Members for 2024 were: Kevin Brennan, Sue Dickey, Mary Ann Erb, Bob Erb, Sr., Rob Erb, Jr., Cameron Krause, Sharon Schnaars and Ed Thierolf. We will miss Ed who served faithfully for many years until his death in January 2025. The Cemetery Committee Members going forward in 2025 are the same, with Stacey Brennan joining.

Respectfully submitted, **Mary Ann Erb**

Music and Worship Report for 2024



Committee Members: Robert Schnaars (chairperson), Sharon Schnaars, Rev Frances Chester, Brenda Becker, Fran Berkowitz, Peg Heffner, Jim Kooser, Cassandra Krause, Cameron Krause. Arlene Butts Umstead (in memoriam / passing 9/28/2024 / age 92) Liz Francisco (choir director / organist) March 20, 2024 until June 23, 2024 (resigned)

January: Our first meeting of 2024 was held on January 8, 2024. The majority of this meeting was discussion for the upcoming Lent and Easter Seasons. We agreed to have an Ash Wednesday Service (Feb 14, 2024). For the Easter Season, we will again have the prayer vigil beginning Thursday, March 28th until noon on Good Friday, March 29th.

February: Rev Frances took an apostolic Sunday on February 18, 2024 – Susan Mercer led the service.

--Cameron Krause, a young member of our church, has taken over the live streaming of our Sunday church services. Bob Schnaars continues to assist.

--We held our Ash Wednesday service on Feb 14, 2024 in our Fellowship Room. This service was well attended and Communion was served.

--Liz Francisco, who had played for our Christmas Eve service, agreed to take our job offer as choir director/organist. She would officially start March 20, 2024.

March: Palm Sunday (March 24, 2024); Maundy Thursday Service & Begin Prayer Vigil (March 28-29, 2024); Easter Sunday (March 31, 2024). We did not have a Good Friday Service in 2024. We had an Easter sunrise service at 8:00AM and our regular service at 10:00AM.

--Liz Francisco came on board as our choir director as of March 20, 2024 and we set up a “meet & greet” time after church on March 24.

--It was decided at our March meeting that our summer church services would remain at 10:00AM – keeping the same as usual. We opted not to go with earlier time for summer months.

April: April 14, 2024 was an apostolic Sunday for Rev Frances. Lee Comer led the service.

--Maundy Thursday and Prayer Vigil was discussed. For the safety of our members and friends – plus the fact that overnight prayer sign-ups are few – we decided that our future prayer vigil will have to change. In 2025, we will start the prayer vigil at noon on Maundy Thursday until 9:00PM that evening. At that time, the sanctuary lights will remain lit and the church will be locked until Good Friday. The prayer vigil will resume at 5:00AM on Good Friday and will end at 2:00PM. It remains our “prayer vigil” – just not a 24 hour continuous prayer vigil.

May: Rev Frances took an education week (May 20 – 26, 2024). Rev Ann Few led the service on May 26, 2024.

--Much discussion regarding the need to set up another search for choir director/organist. Liz Francisco submitted her resignation to be effective June 23, 2024. She took a position as choir director at another church.

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Music and Worship Report for 2024

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June: Rev Frances is taking off two Sunday's in June – apostolic and vacation. June 9, 2024 Bob Schnaars will provide a homily; June 16, 2024 Pastor Paul Jones will provide the sermon.

--June 23, 2024 is Liz Francisco's last Sunday. She agreed to record some hymns on our organ to help us provide organ music for Sunday services. Our organ in the sanctuary has the ability to "record", so we are having Liz play tunes that multiple hymns can be sung to. Bob Schnaars will also provide music with guitar. Bob will also learn the process of playing the recordings on the organ for services.

--It was decided the choir would not sing over the summer and will resume in late August. The search for a choir director will begin again.

July: Rev Frances vacation: July 17-23 (vacation) with Pastor Paul Jones providing sermon - July 21.

--Jim Kooser met with a friend he knows who plays organs for a living – Vince Ryan. Mr Ryan is not interested in playing for our church as an organist each week, but he did have a student that he felt might be interested. Bob Schnaars contacted and met with Philip Crush (the aforementioned "student"). Philip agreed to come and record music once a month for all Sunday services in that particular month. He will initially be paid \$400. a month. Philip will come the last week of each month to record the hymns for the following month. It was a solution to not having an organist each Sunday. Bob Schnaars sent confirmation to Philip of duties and agreed monthly fee/salary.

--Philip Crush came to church Sunday, July 14, 2024, and played the organ for that service. He felt it would give the congregation a chance to meet him so they would know who was recording our hymns.

August: Rev Frances vacation August 3 – 10. Rev Tyson Frey will provide sermon on Sunday, August 4, 2024. Apostolic Sunday August 11 with Susan Mercer to lead worship and provide sermon.

--Erin Ahart provided special music with Bob Erb on August 25, 2024. They sang a duet "The Prayer". Erin was our choir director her senior year of high school and she has continued to visit with us ever since (she is a college graduate and employed in Washington DC now).

--Rev Frances purchased an "Advent Series" for our 2024 Advent season at approx cost of \$84.00.

--Choir rehearsals began again – Aug 14, 2024. Bob Schnaars leading with the help of Ann Few on piano. The entire choir is helping and are being so supportive since we don't have an "official" choir director. A GREAT choir!

September: Faith Formation Sunday – September 8, 2024. Service held in Fellowship room along with a potluck breakfast. Breakfast at 9:00AM followed by service at 10:00AM. Ann Few played piano for hymns along with Bob Schnaars on guitar. Choir sang as well. We also started to build our "Wall of Works" where our church family could write on a paper "brick" the many works that we saw or found in one another. Each "brick" helped to build our "wall".

--Rev Frances introduced a Field Education Student on Sept 8 – Kelly Johannsen. Kelly will be doing her internship with Falkner Swamp UCC until Spring of 2025. Welcome Kelly!

--New book study began September 19, 2024 at 7:00PM – lead by Rev Frances and Ann Few – "Stretch Out Your Hand" which explored healing prayer.

--On September 28, 2024 our organist and church member, Arlene Borneman Butts Umstead passed away at age 92. She was our church organist for 65 years and a lifelong member of Falkner Swamp. Her funeral was set for Dec 7, 2024.

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Music and Worship Report for 2024

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October: Apostolic Sunday October 20, 2024 – Pastor Paul Jones leading service/providing sermon.
--Rev Frances was ordained October 3, 2004 in Columbus, Ohio. During our church service on Sept 29, 2024 we gave recognition to Rev Frances for her 20 years since her ordination.

--Cassandra Krause questioned at what age would our youth be able to become acolytes. It was decided children in fifth grade would be able to start as acolytes.

November: All Saints Sunday – Nov 3, 2024. Candles were provide on the altar for members to light in memory of loved ones. We specifically honored members who passed in 2024 as of November – Shirley Royer, Linda Rennard and Arlene Butts Umstead. We later lost another member – Veronica “Vin” Rosenberry on Dec 3, 2024.

--November 17, 2024 was our congregational meeting after the morning church service.

December: Rev Frances vacation - December 29, 2024. Kelly Johannsen (Field Education Student) lead the worship service.

--Church decorating will begin Dec 1, 2024 after the morning church service. We provided pizza to those who stayed to help.

--Christmas Eve Service was Dec 24, 2024 at 7:00PM – Candlelight Service. Over 100 folks attended! Bob Erb and Erin Ahart sang “Oh Holy Night” and “Mary Did You Know”. Bob Erb sang a solo with Bob Schnaars accompanying on guitar – “Some Children See Him”. Four members of our choir (Ann Few, Peg Heffner, Ingrid Weil and Kelly Johannsen) sang the German version of Silent Night (Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht) while the congregations hand-held candles were being lit. The entire congregation then sang Silent Night to only candlelight in the sanctuary.

--A new digital piano was purchased for the choir room – for the choir to use – because the piano that was in that room for practices never stayed “in tune” and was used and very old. A huge “thank you” to Jim Kooser and his friend, David Duncan. Jim’s friend donated \$1200 to Falkner Swamp UCC for the sole purpose of buying a digital piano for our choir!

--The search for a choir director will begin again – hopefully, starting February 2025.

--It was noted that Philip Crush who records our hymns on our organ each month, is working out really well. Bob Schnaars usually plays the hymns that were recorded each Sunday morning. However, Bob also gave instructions to Peg Heffner, Jim Kooser and Sharon Schnaars on how this process works. These are folks that can work the organ as back-up for Bob Schnaars.

--Just wanted to make note of this in M&W notes for information purposes. Bob Schnaars is back-up for weekly Sunday service streaming in the event Cameron Krause is not available. Back-up for the back-up is Kevin Brennan.

Respectfully Yours & Submitted by:

Robert D Schnaars, Chairperson for Music & Worship Committee

2024 REPORT FROM CHOIR



The Falkner Swamp UCC choir had an interesting 2024. From January until March the choir was led by Bob Schnaars. Our choir initially had 17 active participants. By the end of 2024, we still had 14 active participants. Unfortunately, two of our choir members were unable to continue due to illness and one youth felt more attention had to be given to school studies (which is important!). In March we did manage to hire a choir director – Liz Francisco. She helped us get through the Easter season, but unfortunately gave her notice to resign June 2024. She accepted a choir director position with another larger church. However, our choir members are strong and all decided to keep the choir going. Again, Bob Schnaars stepped in with guitar to help; Ann Few stepped in to play piano; Choir members stepped in to help select music and to improve our overall communication. For a small church like ours, our choir managed to keep on going – and, going strong.

That being said, we are still in need and we are still looking for a choir director. If anyone knows of someone who plays piano – someone who could help our choir provide music for church services, please let ANY CHOIR MEMBER know. Honestly, this position would probably require about 3 – 4 hours of time a week. Our choir is flexible and cooperative. We all love to sing and we all want to provide music for services to praise our Lord and Savior.

Also – if anyone in our church family would like to give singing in the choir a try – PLEASE let us know. You are welcome whether you can read music or not (most of us do not read music). And, yes, you can sing...

Thank you,
Bob Schnaars (and the Falkner Swamp UCC Choir)



Flower Committee Report for 2024

Altar Flowers are available to sponsor on all Sundays with the exception of Easter Sunday and the Sunday before Christmas when special flowers and plants are available to anyone in honor or memory of a loved one. If you would like to sponsor flowers to be placed on the Altar, please call or text Becky Comer no later than noon on the Tuesday before the Sunday you wish to have flowers. If you want particular flowers or colors, be sure to notify Becky. You can also do your own write-up for the Sunday Bulletin (send this request to Sharon in the office by 10:00 the Wednesday before you want flowers). We use Wendy's Flowers and the cost is \$30. Anytime you want to supply your own flowers in memory or honor of a loved one, please let Becky know.

Easter and Christmas Flowers are available as stated above. Order Sheets will be available several weeks before these holidays. Prices vary.

Becky Comer – 610.413.3729

Faith Formation Committee 2024

Members: Rev. Frances Chester, Becky Comer, Susan Mercer



The Children: In August, we met with the children for a Backpack Blessing. We sat beneath a tree out near our cemetery for a story, had a picnic lunch and fellowship before their school year begins. Starting in September, the children's lessons were those that mirrored the topics presented by the pastor. Many times, the topics need more discussion and explanation time. Other lessons focus on New Testament Jesus stories of miracles and parables.

Many thanks to the parents who act as aides each Sunday, escorting the kids downstairs after the Children's Message. They engage in free-playtime and craft activities in fellowship with others. Then the instructors come down and we enter into Bible lesson time and singing.

During Advent Season, the children's lessons and activities focused on the Nativity Story through the books and songs entitled The Friendly Beasts and The Little Drummer Boy. The Children enjoyed participating in the Christmas With the Dogs program. They performed songs, enjoyed cookies, and each received a gift bag.

We collected a wonderful amount of gift cards in December 2024 in support of the children at Bethany Children's Home-\$845. Blessings to all of you!

During the Lenten Season, we continue to coordinate lessons with the pastor's lessons. The Children hear the Easter story with supporting craft activities and songs. They will again sing Easter Bells which includes the Children's Bells. The kids really enjoyed learning how to perform with a set of a one-octave mini-bells. Many thanks to Ann Few who was able to create the bell choir music solely based on an audio of the song sung. We will continue to utilize the bells in future songs.

We continue to host our annual Easter Egg Hunt. The date will be set for April. The hunt is well attended, with 10-14 children searching high and low for treasured eggs out on the side lawn and in the cemetery. Easter cookies and juice round out the event.

Joyful Noise continues to be a great success. The children enjoy walking out into the congregation collecting coins. It is so appreciated how many of the adults are sure to give coins to each of the children's collection cans. The monies are split 50/50 between The Mustard Seed and Operation 143. The 2024 total : \$847.49 Thank you all!

Confirmation Class In 2024, Lucas Krause was a class of one. He completed all requirements, as well as putting together a very successful Capstone project: a lasagna luncheon. The proceeds went to support a local family and the costs of their son's ongoing medical condition. \$800 was raised. Lucas was confirmed in May and continues to be an active member at Falkner Swamp.

The Adults have been strengthening and sharing our relationship and understanding of God's plan through weekly Scripture Studies meetings. We meet on Tuesdays 1:00-2:00pm. Our topics range from looking at the many religions amongst the many cultures, as well as dissecting and discussing the scriptures that will be used in the upcoming Sunday Service. Treats have also started to show up from time to time. If you have a free Tuesday afternoon, come join us..

We look forward to continuing our efforts in supporting our members, friends and neighbors as our faith continues to grow and expand. Please feel free to share any ideas you may have.

In God's Love,

Frances, Becky, and Susan

Women's Ministries

Women's Ministries Yearbook 2024



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

- Donated money to the Dinner Mission
- Coordinated Red Food Drive for BAMS
- Donated Easter Baskets to BAMS
- Helped with our annual Peanut Butter Fundraiser
- Donation made to church in honor of our men singing at Ladies Night
- Made gifts to honor our men for Father's Day
- Donation to Lucas for classmate with cancer
- Purchased and filled 10 backpacks for BAMS
- Sponsored "143" mission food project
- Donations made in memory of Linda Rennard, Shirley Royer, and Arlene Umstead(\$50 ea)
- Donated \$50 each to American Legion for Veterans Day and BAMS for Thanksgiving
- Sponsored a child for Christmas through BAMS

Social

- Ladies Night
- Lunch and meeting held in June at Copperfield
- Breakfast at Sunflower Café in December attended by 26 church members

Fundraisers

- Sold Logs, Swag, Ladder Décor
- Sold 30 Fall Breads

Members: Carol Stevens, Olga Rees, Eleanor Specht, Linda Sell, Judy Miller, Doris Moser, Ellen Whitfield, Joanne Lewis, Beth Reese, Susan Mercer, Barbara Geary-Secretary, Sharon Sgriccia-Treasurer. Founder-Arlene Umstead (9/28/24 d.)

2024 Women's Ministries Fund Summary	
\$499	Beginning Balance
\$150	free will offering
\$1,287	fundraising proceeds
\$275.50	Falkner Swamp donations/expenses (goods & money)
\$570	donations to outside organizations (goods & money)
\$1,090.50	Ending Balance

Falkner Swamp Reformed Church of the United Church of Christ

ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE – Yearbook Report for 2024

Chair Becky Comer

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

 Note: 2024 was Russ Miller's last year, replacement needed

Rev. Frances Chester - Pastor

Defacto Consistory President - Karen Miller

Category A (Unrestricted Principal/Income)

Account #1 \$42,837.99 CD 883704-S1003 @ Citadel Credit Union

 Rate 4.25% - Matures April 8, 2026

 Balance 12/31/23 - \$43,289.94 (+\$5.00 Savings Acct.)

 Signers- Lee Heffner & Ken Berkowitz

Account #2 High Yield Savings Acct. 883704-S0000 @Citadel CU

 Balance 12/31/24 - \$24,499.66 (3.82% Variable Interest rate)

Account #3 \$30,646.18 CD 883704-1007@Citadel CU

 Rate 4.60% - Matures March 18, 2026

 Balance 12/31/24 - \$31,045.68

 Signers - Lee Heffner and Ken Berkowitz

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

 Interest (\$3,622.77) thru 10/31/24; Interest added to Account #2 above

Total Category A - \$128,840.28 on 12/31/2024

Category B (Restricted Principal/Unrestricted Income)

Account #1 \$28,501.47 - CD 883704-S1005 @ Citadel Credit Union

 Rate 5.05% - Matures May 25, 2025

 Balance 12/31/24 - \$29,608.09

 Signers - Lee Heffner and Ken Berkowitz

 Interest to go to general fund annually (when CD matures).

 Principal to be reinvested.

Category C Restricted Principal/Restricted Income

Account #1 \$2,400.00 - CD 883704-S1006 @ Citadel Credit Union

 Rate 5.05% - Matures May 25, 2025

 Balance 12/31/24 - \$2,493.23

 Signers - Lee Heffner and Ken Berkowitz

 Interest (58.5% OCWM, 41.5% Organ Repair)

 Principal to be reinvested



Cleaning Teams Report for 2024

Things are going very well with our Cleaning Teams and the cleaning of the church. We have all worked hard to keep the church tidy and clean. As every member of Falkner Swamp knows, it is everyone's job to keep the church clean. We ask the congregation to also do their part, i.e., if they see something out of place or in need of cleaning, you may want to take the time and return it to its proper place or even do a little cleaning. You may also contact one of us. We would like to thank the following 2024 cleaners: Sharon & Bob Schnaars, Carol Stevens, Ken Sell, Linda Sell, Ellen Whitfield, Brenda Becker, Brenda Semach, Susan Mercer, Cassandra Krause, Olga Rees, Joanne Lewis, Barb Geary, Lee Heffner, Becky Comer.

We are in need of cleaners for the months of May and July. Please see Becky Comer or Brenda Semach if you are interested in joining a cleaning team.

~Brenda & Becky



◆ Red Food Collection February 2—March 2

Women's Ministries will be collecting "red" food items to donate to Boyertown Area Multi-Service. Spaghetti sauce, Jello, tomato soup, ketchup, etc.

- ◆ Community Breakfast helpers—1st Saturday February—May (see the sign up in Fellowship Hall)
- ◆ Peanut Butter Egg Making: March 24—28 starting @ 9 AM daily until ? Any and all help welcome and needed. Last year we had great support for this church fundraiser and it was very successful. Many hands made light(er) work. We hope to have the same level of help this year. Please come out to support our church and enjoy some fun & fellowship!
- ◆ Church Bazaar—April 26 (see the FUNdraising report on page 15 for more details)

Falkner Swamp Green Team and Pollinator Garden 2024



Pollinator Garden

In 2022, Falkner Swamp UCC committed to the UCC 50-50 challenge to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Our project was to create a pollinator-friendly garden, which we did in 2023.

The past year was challenging due to the drought. Stacey and Debbie watered the garden as often as possible, and Jim built a rain barrel and PVC sprinkling system to capture rainwater from the roof to water the garden. In addition, Jim installed an outdoor faucet close to the garden to make watering easier.

Although we only spotted one or two butterfly chrysalis this year, we provided food and shelter for goldfinches and other birds. In addition, we planted the bulbs of the commemorative lilies for Reverend Gary Hauze and they bloomed this summer.

The garden is currently wintering over. Bees sometimes spend the winter in the dead stalks of perennials, so we will not cut back the stalks until spring.

Off Plastics

In October 2024, we committed to PSEC Environmental Justice Mission Team's Off Plastics October. Karen Miller submitted our commitment application, and we were the only church in the PSEC to submit an entry. We received the \$50 award from the EJ team, but, more importantly, we planted seeds for faithful actions. Although we have not followed all the suggested actions, we have begun some of them and hope that more church members and friends will join as time goes on. The actions include, but are not limited to:

- Bring our own coffee mugs for church social events to reduce/eliminate Styrofoam cups (Styrofoam takes 500 years or more to biodegrade in landfills).
- Recycle plastic bags and commit to using reusable shopping bags whenever possible.
- Use real or paper plates.
- Use the water coolers (and paper cups) instead of individual bottles of water.
- Use large hand soap refills instead of buying new small bottles.
- Use cloth table covers.
- Use tulle to wrap raffle baskets.

There is a bin in the narthex to collect plastic shopping bags. By recycling them, we keep plastics out of the landfills and help them be recycled into sustainable products. Our 2024 donations helped the Ringing Hill Fire Company meet their goal of 1,000 pounds of plastics and qualified them to receive a Trex bench through the Nextrex plastic recycling program. Future collections will benefit other organizations including the Pottstown Stowe Lions Club.

Respectfully submitted, by Debbie Lord on behalf of The Green Team

The Green Team can be you! Since it's inception in 2021, the following people have contributed "green" initiatives for planting and recycling: Kevin & Stacey Brennan, Laura Brown, Becky Comer, Jim Kooser, Rob Krause, Susan Mercer, Karen Miller.

Please talk to Debbie or Stacey if you have an idea or want to be involved.



FUNdraising Committee Report

Our FUNdraising Committee was created in 2024, both to help the church financially, and to plan events and activities to encourage members of the community to stop in to see what we're all about. We held several events and fundraisers over the past year and surpassed our fundraising goal of \$2,000 by \$255. We're off to a good start!

Our first fundraiser was a bake sale at Freed's. So many of you, plus your family members and friends, donated baked goods for the sale – it was a huge success thanks to you! Another bake sale is planned for April 12, 2025; more details will follow.

Jana R. hosted a painting class at Falkner Swamp which was greatly enjoyed by all who attended, and they went home with some beautiful art. Thank you, Jana, for generously sharing your time and talents with us! We also had an outdoor movie night to watch *Angels in the Outfield*. Although only a small group attended, those of us who were there had a good time, and we hope to try this event again.

We held two basket raffles in 2024 – one in the spring, and one at Christmastime. The committee members had fun creating baskets for the raffle, and we sincerely appreciate everyone who donated a basket and/or participated in the raffles.

Looking to the future, the committee is planning to hold a church bazaar on Saturday, April 26. We will be selling gently used items, as well as some food/snacks/desserts. We will also be renting spots outside if you would like to sell your own items. We are asking for your donations of unwanted (but still saleable) items prior to March 31. Our committee is very excited about the bazaar, but in order for this event to be a success, ***WE NEED YOUR HELP!*** We need you to donate items for us to sell, and we need helpers on the day of the bazaar. There is (or will be shortly) a sign-up sheet for helpers on the bulletin board. We can't pull off this big of a fundraiser without a lot of help from the congregation.

Our Committee has added several new members over the year, and we would love to add a few more! We would also like to hear your ideas, so please share!

We are very grateful to Barb G. for all of her hard work on the committee this past year!

2025 FUNdraising Committee Members: Larry Ercolino, Jim Fahy, Patty Fritz, Wayne Gruver, Rob & Cassandra Krause, and Karen Miller.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Krause, Committee Chair

Stewardship Committee 2024 Report

The Stewardship Committee formed after taking a critical look at how our church was meeting the characteristics of being a Mission-forward congregation. We work in conjunction with Consistory, The Budget Committee, and the FUNdraising Committee. Currently, there are five members: Karen Miller, Lee Comer, Diane Weller, Susan Mercer, and Rev. Frances Chester (ad hoc). We meet on the second Sunday each month in the conference room after the Service and Fellowship/Snack time.

One area that needed a closer evaluation was how well we utilize our Time, Talents, and Treasures at Falkner Swamp. We also want to increase transparency and communication to keep everyone more aware of our financials and our missions great and small.

Being a good Steward is the giving of not only our monies, but also our Time, Talents, and other Treasures. Our committee's goal is to help develop in all a loving spirit of Gratitude and Generosity.

Actions we have put into place so far:

- We deliver to the congregation a monthly "Stewardship Seed"- a short message about being a good steward or an update.
- A request for those able to increase their weekly giving by 10%. If you give \$5, could you give \$5.50?
- Providing an explanation for the categories of giving seen on the offering envelopes- current, benevolence, other.
- Providing a look at how our Budget Process works
- Asking for a change of date for our Annual Congregational Meetings from November to December
- Creating a display wall of bricks highlighting all the many known and lesser-known acts of Time and Talents given in our church and beyond its walls

Blessings and please think about joining this team, remembering that we are indeed the Hands and Feet of our Lord.

From the Church Office: Falkner Swamp membership statistics for 2024 [2023 in brackets]

Total Additions: 5 (4 new members, 1 Confirmand) [2]

Total Losses: 4 (3 deaths, 1 removal request) [1]

Total Membership as of 12/31/2024 85 [84]

Total Baptisms: 3 [4]

Average Weekly Worship Attendance: 49 [47]



Come one and all to our [sometimes] Annual

Fastnacht Social

Friday, February 21st

7 PM

Donuts and Beverages provided.

See some old favorites and maybe a few new acts sure to become favorites. Hope to see you there.

Spring 2025 Calendar

February 1—Community Breakfast from 8—11 AM (also March 1, April 5 & May 3)

February 21—Fastnacht Social @ 7 PM

March 5 —Ash Wednesday, 6:30pm Worship (CWS special offering)

March 9 —1st Sunday in Lent (Church World Service special offering)

March 24 - 28—peanut butter egg making 9 AM—?

April 13 —Palm Sunday (One Great Hour of Sharing special offering)

April 17—Maundy Thursday (Church World Service special offering)

April 20—Easter Sunday

April 26—Church Bazaar

May 13—Ladies' Night (more details to come)

June 8 —Pentecost



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.