

Annual Report to the Congregation

*First Presbyterian Church—Newark
Annual Congregational Meeting
February 4, 2024*



*A nurturing community in Jesus Christ
reflecting God's love for the world as we Worship, Grow, and Serve*

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Foreword

In this congregational report, our committees and leaders provide summaries of church accomplishments during 2023. These summaries are great testaments to the dedication of our members who, in voice and deed, further the work of our church and its mission. I believe you will agree with me that the accomplishments are most impressive.

The summaries highlight many joyful events of this last year: reestablishing the First Saturday breakfast with our recovery community, creating a powerful and joyful music team with the choir and praise team, meeting and exceeding our giving. But there are many more. You can read about many of them in the pages that follow.

Once again, this congregation has shown resilience, perseverance, and faith to move ahead in the challenges that we have faced. I believe you will find inspiration and encouragement that our church's work goes on and we are given great opportunities to serve the Lord.

In Christ, Pastor Eric

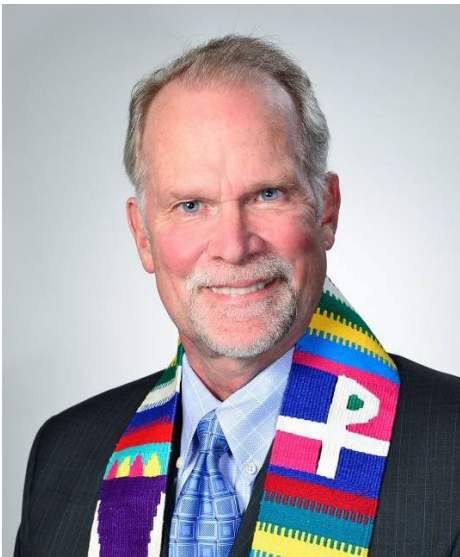


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Pastor's Report

Rev. Eric Markman

2023 was an amazing year for FPC-N. Early in the year the Mission Review Committee, drawing from the work of the congregation in Vital Congregations discussions, meetings with Dr. Len Hedges-Goettl, and creation of a Mission Statement, finished the Mission Study. This was then sent to the Presbytery for approval. Once approved, the congregation formed a Pastor Nominating Committee which went to work. On November 5 the Rev. Dan McKenty gave a powerful sermon and led worship. After the service a special congregational meeting was held, and Pastor Dan was approved as the new called pastor of FPC-N, starting in mid-February!

Due to much needed repairs, estimated at roughly \$200,000, session closed Westminster House in early January. After many discussions, all recovery groups moved to Memorial Hall. A new day has begun! First Saturday breakfast with attendance of up to 45, hosted by various committees and groups of FPC-N, was restarted with leadership from Deacons Bob Wenner and Jan Huckleberry.

A new fellowship activity, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, was started by the deacons. This was joyfully welcomed by the congregation, with over 100 attending! Nearly simultaneously, our incredibly talented office administrator, Cindy Rogers, was offered an amazing position at a local company and turned in her letter letting us know that she was leaving. A search was led by Human Resources Committee (HR) and Grace Laughinghouse was called to the newly defined position. Coming to us at the beginning of Lent, she proved her ability to not only get everything done, but to do so with a smile and joy. A person of deep faith, much like Cindy before her, she is a very positive addition to the working life of our church.

The Band of Brothers was reinstated and every Wednesday at noon a large group of men meet in the church library. Sadly, though I attend, I can only report that "what happens in Band of Brothers stays in Band of Brothers." I am allowed to say there is always a stimulating Bible-based study, currently a study of the Gospel of John led by David Lovelace, amid boisterous discussion. We invite all men to pack a lunch and join us any Wednesdays that fits your schedule.

Worship services have been enhanced by our great musical talent. The Choir and Praise Team (led by Leia Gibson and Larry Benson) work together to enhance and add meaning and joy to the services. It is important to mention the Worship Committee which meets monthly to discuss and plan for upcoming services. I thank all the members of the Praise Team, the Choir, and the Worship committee for their dedication throughout this year. The services have been inspirational and Church attendance has consistently increased over the year to upwards of 140 (including those who join by our YouTube channel.) New and old members alike have mentioned how much they enjoy the vibrant combined music style of our service.

As we entered 2023, we knew that it would be a challenging year financially. Venture in Faith (VIF) pledges came to \$226,000, well below what was needed to operate our church and its missions. Trusting in the generosity of the congregation, we set a goal of \$333,000 in giving—a true “venture in faith”! And yet, with your amazing generosity this congregation met the promised \$226,000 and was about \$500 above the \$333,000 goal. This is the sign of a generous and vital congregation, willing to praise the Lord in many ways!

Throughout this year our Music Director/Organist search committee has continued to work diligently under the leadership of Jerry Holt with consultation by Tim Evers (thank you Jerry, and Tim.) As of this writing, however, we have yet to find a successful candidate. The search will continue in 2024. During this search period we have tried to engage an organist but this has proven difficult to achieve on a regular basis.

Eleven members of the church are now part of the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us. Each was a wonderful and amazing person. We will miss them, but we know that they have gone before us. Having lived lives of faith, they now find the promised home that Christ has prepared for all who have placed their faith in Him.

And finally, this was my last year with First Presbyterian. It has been a privilege being with you for this part of your journey. I have learned much and thank you for all you have taught me. I will miss all of you. Of course, there have been times when things were difficult, challenging, and even scary, but we walked together on the path that God set before us. Now I move to another path to which God calls me. You have a new pastor to join you on the path that God is calling you. Go boldly forth with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, serving the Lord in all that you do!

In the peace of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus,

Pastor Eric

Session

Clerk's Report

Nancy Lewis (Clerk of Session)

The Session worked very hard this year to make good decisions which will help our church to prosper and to bring us closer to helping our neighbors, whether they are in Newark or they are across the world, like our friends in Dinanga.

Our church organization this year changed from a Bicameral to a Unicameral board. This means that we added the Trustees and their responsibilities to the Session. This allows quicker response and better communication to issues that arise.

The sanctuary improvements have allowed us to consistently broadcast our services via YouTube, and have encouraged outside musical groups to use our buildings. We are using this opportunity to attend each of these music performances, and invite the attendees to worship with us.

This year we collaborated with Newark Area Welfare. Many members of our congregation assisted with stocking tables and giving grocery items to deserving Newark neighbors in December.

Our collaboration with the Recovery Community is increasing and we have reinstated the First Saturday Breakfasts. The Recovery Community is very happy with the arrangements we have made with them.

We are sad to say goodbye to Interim Pastor Eric Markman. He made many good friends within our church, and also in the Newark pastoral community. He excels at visiting with our congregants who are at home and who need pastoral help. He brought new members into our congregation and we look forward to their growth in Christ with us.

Pastor Tshibuabua of the Dinanga church continues to communicate with us and sends us prayers. We helped their congregation to purchase food and to help needy students attend school.

Our church also continued our partnership with Jewish Family Services. We formed a Circle of Care for refugees. We are now assisting people from Afghanistan and the Ukraine. This group is made up of Melanie Bock, Greg Hills, Shirley Hills, Faithe Koser, Nancy Lewis, Annette Mehan, Ron Mehan, and Carolyn Morton. The group helped a teenage Ukrainian boy join a swim team and are counseling an Afghan man on health insurance problems and finances. We also support a new Non-Profit called STAR (Support Transformation for Advancement of Refugees) started by one of our Afghan refugees. Working with refugees has been a very rewarding experience, and we invite any interested people to join our Circle of Care.

We are very happy that we were able to find Grace Laughinghouse, who has filled the role of Church administrator. We are also happy that the Pastor Nominating Committee completed their work, and Pastor Dan McKenty is starting to work with us.

In the midst of all these joys and challenges, your Session is thoughtfully following our promise to watch over the members of the congregation and provide for their worship, nurture, and service, as well as reaching out to help our community.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Nancy Lewis
Clerk of Session

CHURCH OFFICERS

Session **Clerk of Session:** Nancy Lewis

Class of 2024: Jim Annett, Melody Bock, Pat Nelson, Bob Wunder
Class of 2025: Joe Kowalski, Nancy Lewis, Ron Olson, Mark Sisk
Class of 2026: Mimi Lovelace, Jim Pierson-Perry, Don Tancredi

Deacons **Moderator:** Jane Moore

Class of 2024: Rosemarie Beron, Jane Moore, Darlene Newsom, Nancy Stevens
Class of 2025: Judy Agnello, Stephanie Birdsall, Jan Huckleberry, Bob Wenner
Class of 2026: Julia Blair, Clinton Nanji, Vickie Pierson-Perry, David Angel Trujillo

ECCLESIASTICAL EVENTS - 2023

BAPTISMS

Bryson Byrne
Rowyn Byrne
Liam Nanji
Ethan Nanji

IN MEMORIAM OF OUR MEMBERS

Margaret Catts
Elizabeth (Betty) Dalton
Ron Gardner
Elizabeth (Betty) Hoagey
William (Bill) Lewis
B. JoAnne McNeely
Patricia (Pat) Steele
Betty Thompson
Alice Vernier
Stacy Wenner

NEW MEMBERS FOR 2023 1

Transfer of Certificate 1

Loida Wilburn

MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

Active Members as of December 31, 2022: 236

Total Active Members as of December 31, 2023: 227

Average Worship Attendance for 2023: 97

PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Dave Evers and Jynx Stevenson, Co-Facilitators

Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him...Psalms 37:7

On March 5, 2023, we held a special congregational meeting for the proposal of a vote to elect 9 candidates that would serve as the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).

The journey began with in-depth research of PCUSA processes, learning the Pastoral Nominating Committee lingo, and mastering a newly developed online search system. Fortunately, our congregation had completed many of the requirements necessary for the search process, such as the Mission Study Report – 2023, as well as Vital Congregations and Vision Quest workshops, which enabled the PNC to better understand the needs of our congregational members. Together, with consultation of our New Castle Presbytery contacts, the committee outlined the PNC Discernment Process and identified the key phases that would signify our search progress.

The reported outcomes from the congregational workshops were utilized by the committee to write our church's profile that was posted in the online system. After reviewing more than 30 pastoral profiles, we narrowed our search to those we discerned to be potential candidates, held interviews, and ultimately were led to find our new pastor. Collectively, the committee learned a lot about trust and patience during this time and how to "just follow the process".

On November 5, 2023, we held a special congregational meeting to vote for Reverend Daniel McKenty to become our new called pastor. We look forward to Pastor McKenty's leadership as he shepherds us into our future growth as a congregation, seeking to serve the surrounding community and the world around us.

We thank the members of the committee for being dedicated to the mission at hand and the congregation for upholding the committee in your prayers. We also thank Rev. Eric Markman, Interim Pastor – FPC-N, Rev. Dr. Tracy Keenan, New Castle Missional Presbyter, and Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, New Castle Connectional Presbyter/Stated Clerk for their caring guidance throughout the process. Finally, we especially thank Grace Laughinghouse for her help and support as our Church Office Manager.

Committee members –: Lorraine Conner, Dave Evers, Greg Hills, Lois Huggins, Mimi Lovelace, Beth Marshall, Jim Pierson-Perry, Kern Piser, and Jynx Stevenson

Respectfully submitted,
Dave Evers and Jynx Stevenson, PNC Committee Co-facilitators

Belonging Ministry

Board of Deacons

Jane Moore (Moderator)

Members: Judy Agnello, Rosemarie Beron, Stephanie Birdsall, Julie Blair, Jan Huckleberry, Jane Moore, Clinton Nanji, Darlene Newsom, Vickie Pierson-Perry, Nancy Stevens, David Trujillo, and Bob Wenner.

The Board of Deacons works together to serve the members of our congregation. Deacons also interact with other groups in our church; hence we have liaisons to Session, Human Resource Committee, Church Bylaws Committee, and a representative on Nominating Committee. A Deacon also serves as liturgist one Sunday a month. We support our sister church in Dinanga by prayer and sending greetings. We provide emergency financial support to church or community members in dire financial need. We also staffed the First Presbyterian Church table at Newark Community Day on Sept. 17 and we provide copies of *The Upper Room* pamphlet in the Narthex for members to take for home worship.

Pastor Eric Markman led the annual Deacons training by helping us focus on the duties of our roles in Deacons and prepare a guide for future Deacons, as well as for our new pastor. We continue to meet on Zoom and in person to make it easier for all Deacons to be present at meetings.

One of our most important functions is to visit church members in rehab facilities and in their homes, to serve them home communion and deliver flowers to them. Stephanie Birdsall prepares the flower delivery schedule and each Deacon participates in selecting recipients of the flowers, and Nancy Stevens schedules home communion visits. At Easter we delivered bags containing candy or stuffed bunnies, and at Christmas we delivered adorable snowmen, handmade by Rosemarie Beron, and stuffed animals to our members who are homebound or are in nursing homes. Thinking of You, Get Well, Sympathy, Congratulations, and Holiday cards were caringly sent by Darlene Newsom to members to mark significant occasions.

Fellowship is a special gift that the Deacons share with our congregation. This year, led by Jan Huckleberry and Vickie Pierson-Perry, we again held the annual Strawberry Picnic on June 11 in Memorial Hall with over 100 people in attendance. We hope next year to combine indoor and outdoor options for those wishing to picnic outside. We participated in serving Punch on the Lawn during the summer. We once again offered the Harvest Fest, a wonderful turkey dinner with all the fixings, on October 29 after several years of not being able to do so. And, with much enthusiasm, Deacons added a new tradition—Shrove (Fat) Tuesday Pancake Supper with musical entertainment by the Rockdale Boys. More than 100 people enjoyed the festivities, including members of the Recovery Community who had recently moved their meetings into Memorial Hall. We also helped Pastor Eric celebrate 35 years of Ministry with a reception after church. First Saturday Pancake Breakfast for the Recovery Community was revived and is led monthly by Deacons Bob Wenner and Jan Huckleberry, jointly with other FPC organizations.

Memorial receptions are organized by the Board of Deacons. Many receptions were beautifully arranged in Memorial Hall or the Parlor, with Judy Agnello organizing the events and the Deacons providing cookies and helping to serve and clean up.

The Board of Deacons is a caring ministry which reaches out to the entire congregation. We participate in the Wednesday morning Prayer Group led by former Deacon Nancy Boulden, to stay informed of church members in need of prayer and visits. Currently Clinton Nanji is responsible for Congregational Care, and he continues to arrange rides for our members needing to go to doctor appointments and medical treatments. Each Deacon has shut-in members to visit. Deacons donated copies of the Max Lucado book *Safe in the Shepherd's Arms* to the Life Support Group, to be given to members in Hospice and those who have lost a loved one. A Blue Christmas Service was held in December for those suffering from grief at the holiday. All of these activities served to broaden the outreach of the Deacons to our congregation.

And finally, the Deacons are deeply grateful to Pastor Eric for his support and guidance of us, as well as for the outstanding support of the church community he provided with his loving, caring visits to our members and their families. We will miss him greatly. We look forward to Pastor Dan bringing his gifts to the Deacons and to the church family.

Presbyterian Women

Carol Olson and Pam Wunder (Co-Moderators)

Presbyterian Women (PW) is open to all Christian women (FPC-N members and non-members). Our 61 active sisters are divided into 5 Circles (small groups) which meet on the third Tuesday of each month. Each monthly meeting consists of Bible study, fellowship, and support of one another as well as the general association activities. This year we are using Max Lucado's book *They Walked with God*. We stay connected with 12 special sisters who are no longer able to participate. We also provide greeters for Sunday worship services and aid to various church functions.



Our June general association meeting was well attended with 45 present in MHW to enjoy music by the Diamond State Chorus of the Sweet Adelines. We ended the evening with our general meeting, featuring the passing of our by-law revisions, recognition of the 2022-'23 officers, and election and installation of officers for 2023-'24.



Our October program featured Chris Locke, who established Sean's House right down the road from FPC-N as a safe haven for students aged 14-24 with mental health issues. A free-will offering collected \$735 and was used to buy a bicycle rack with a chain lock, a sofa, and snacks for finals week.



With contributions from our congregation and PW sisters, homemade Soups/Chilis and Baked Goods were made and our Circles created Raffle Baskets for our very successful fundraiser in October! We raised over \$2700, which was given to Newark Area Welfare, Hope Dining Room, our Presbytery's Guatemala stove project, Friendship House, and Wayfarer's House. Thank you everyone! The response to our ongoing and single event collections demonstrate the generosity of PW members and our congregation.



PW knitters lovingly knit caps and prayer shawls. "Thinking of you" cards were sent to local nursing care centers, bags of can tabs were given to Ronald McDonald House, and stamps were sent to the Stamp Alliance for Bible lesson translation. In partnership with our local community, our Little Food Pantry remained stocked under the premise of "Take what you need; Give what you can." We also support the Presbytery PW Thank Offering, Birthday Offering, and Least Coin Offering as well as Meals on Wheels.



Our Christmas program, "Make a Joyful Noise" featuring our FPC-N choir, Jim Pierson-Perry on piano, and stories and scripture readings, provided a festive way to begin Advent and reminded us of the meaning of the season! Hot cider, cookies and fellowship followed. The support of our free-will offerings for Shoes that Fit and Sean's House was absolutely amazing! Thank You!



Coordinating Ministry

Human Resource Committee (HR)

Jerry Holt (Chair)

The Human Resources Committee (HR) recognizes the continuing efforts and thoughtful initiatives of our entire staff in 2023: Interim Pastor Eric Markman, Acting Handbell Director Steve Breffitt, Praise Team Music Leader Larry Benson, and Office Administrator Grace Laughinghouse, as well as the Praise Service and choir musicians, the nursery workers, and all volunteers as the church completes another year.

We continue to thank Acting Director Steve Breffitt for having led our Handbell Ringers as an unpaid volunteer. The Ringers regularly have an active role in the music of FPC-N and add significantly to our worship experience.

In March 2022, Rodney Cleveland resigned after less than two months as Choir Director, Organist, and Handbell Director. Worship and HR Committees developed a vision for worship music and began the search for a Director of Music Ministries. In the interim, we have had the choir directing talents of Leia Gibson, a UD student, thanks to our relationship with Dr. Paul Head of the Music School. To date, the search results have been disappointing: only one candidate warranted an on-site audition but chose another offer. The search will resume in early 2024 after a reappraisal of both our direction and how FPCN can be more competitive in what is now a “sellers’ market.”

At the end of 2022, Office Manager Cindy Rogers resigned to pursue a new direction. With Session’s approval and support, HR restructured office work back to the level of staffing when Cindy was hired. The search for a half-time Office Administrator brought us Grace Laughinghouse who joined us at the beginning of Lent, an extremely busy part of the church year. She has adapted very well with the help of Sandy Wenner, Pam Wunder, and others.

Annually, HR makes budget recommendations to the Session and works with the Finance Committee to complete the Session-approved Human Resources Budget for the year. Now that FPCN has a unicameral board, HR represents the congregation to the Session.

This year, HR continued our work to assure job descriptions address current needs and upgraded the HR Manual to be consistent with PC(USA) and Presbytery recommendations. On a continuing basis, the Committee works to resolve personnel issues and concerns within the church in a timely, effective manner. We welcome your feedback, comments, suggestions, and concerns regarding staff personnel.

The HR committee members are Jim Annett (at large), Evelyn Hayes (on leave), Jerry Holt (representing Trustees), Nancy Lewis (representing Session), and Jane Moore (representing Deacons). Interim Pastor Eric is also a member. More volunteers will be very welcome.

Church Officer Nominating Committee (CONC)

Bob Wunder (Chair)

In 2023, the Church Officer Nominating Committee (CONC) of First Presbyterian Church found nominees for the Pastor Nominating Committee, Session/Trustees, Deacons, and the new CONC that will start work in 2024.

The 2023 CONC members were Angela Abankwa-Opoku, Lorraine Conner, Jackie Evers, Shirley Hills, Francis Kwansa, Ann Roybal, and Bob Wunder.

Pastor Nominating Committee:

The members of the Pastor Nominating Committee identified by the CONC and elected by the congregation in 2023 were:

Lorraine Conner
Dave Evers
Greg Hills
Lois Huggins
Mimi Lovelace
Beth Marshall
Jim Pierson-Perry
Kern Piser
Jynx Stevenson

For the Session/Trustees board:

The number of Session members was increased from 9 to 12 to reflect additional responsibilities due to changing to a unicameral board. There is one unfilled position in the class of 2026 due to the unexpected withdrawal by a candidate because of unexpected personal issues. This vacancy will be filled when a suitable and willing candidate is found.

The current Session/Trustee members are listed in the table below (Officers elected in 2023 are in **bold type**)

Class of 2024		Class of 2025		Class of 2026	
Elder	term	Elder	term	Elder	term
Melody Bock	1 st	Joe Kowalski	1 st	Mimi Lovelace	2 nd
Pat Nelson	1 st	Nancy Lewis	2 nd	Jim Pierson-Perry	1 st
Bob Wunder	1 st	Mark Sisk	1 st	Don Tancredi	2 nd
Jim Annett	1 ^{st*}	Ron Olson	1 ^{st*}	TBD	1 st

* Partial term to bring the class to 4 members

For the Board of Deacons:

The current members of the board of deacons are listed in the table below (Officers elected in 2023 are in **bold type**)

If elected the Deacon Board will be:

Class of 2024		Class of 2025		Class of 2026	
Elder	term	Elder	term	Elder	term
Rosemarie Beron	2 nd	Judy Agnello	2 nd	Julia Blair	1 st
Jane Moore	2 nd	Stephanie Birdsall	1 st	Clinton Nanji	1 st
Darlene Newsom	1 st #	Jan Huckleberry	2 nd	Vickie Pierson-Perry	1 st
Nancy Stevens	2 nd	Bob Wenner	2 nd	David Angel Trujillo	1 st

Partial term to fill vacancy

Nominating Committee

Members of the Nominating Committee of First Presbyterian Church in 2024 are:

- Lorraine Conner (At-Large)
- Shirley Hills (At-Large),
- Vickie Pierson-Perry (Deacons)
- Sandy Wenner (At-Large)
- Bob Wunder (Session)

Stewardship

Mimi Lovelace (Chair)

In September, the Stewardship Committee began reviewing the income and expenditures to date with the idea of determining the budget for the upcoming year. Throughout November and December, great care is taken to formulate a budget that meets anticipated needs without either leaving us strapped or having asked for too much. It is the intent that the congregation not be repeatedly asked to contribute additional funds for one thing after another.

Also, beginning in October and lasting through mid November, Moments for Mission provided opportunities for those so inclined to share with the congregation the importance that First Presbyterian-Newark plays in their lives. That culminated in the November collection of "Venture in Faith" (VIF) commitment cards, where the Grace, Gratitude, and Rhythm of Faith is acted upon.

For 2023, FPC-N had VIF cards with commitments totaling \$226,000 but received almost \$500 over our VIF goal of \$333,000 (out of total budget of \$489,080). Our budget was under spent in 2023, primarily due to the inability to find and hire a Director of Music and help with moving expenses. That left us additional funds to direct to the Mission and Outreach Committee for local missions and a healthy equity for starting 2024.

For 2024, FPC-N has VIF cards with commitments totaling more than \$246,000 toward a goal of \$336,000 (out of total budget of \$504,000). A new "Venture in Faith" is now underway.

The Stewardship Committee believes that there are two goals worth working toward. The first is that our VIF cover 75% of our total budget, rather than the 66% it currently covers. The second goal is to use 10% of our budget for Missions. No doubt the faithful and generous congregation of FPC-N will get us there!

Special thanks go to Bob Black and Dave Berkebile for their amazing patience in helping me to understand finance, and for the incredible amount of time they spend serving all of us—and getting it right!

Strengthening FPC-N/UD/Newark Community Linkages Team

Pat Nelson, Francis Kwansa, Ann Roybal, Kern Piser

In his sermons, Pastor Eric repeatedly encouraged us to get out into the community—to go beyond what we are already doing. ***The church is called to spread the love and compassion shown by Christ to others.*** It can be intimidating to approach those in worlds different from our own, no matter how good our intentions.

In April, *A Dialogue about Experiences in the Caribbean during the Study Abroad Program* featured UD faculty Dr. Norma Gaines-Hanks and our own Dr. Francis Kwansa, and students who shared what they learned getting to know and working with people who are very different from them. The UD students told of how getting to know children and community members in Barbados enabled them to overcome barriers of cultural difference, made them less judgmental and more appreciative of children and adults living lives so different from their own.

Building on our strengths, FPC-N members actively involved in mission and outreach were celebrated in May. We are thankful for stalwart members who have been volunteering (some for decades) with the Newark Empowerment Center, Habitat for Humanity, Hope Dining Room, Meals on Wheels, Afghan and Ukrainian Resettlement, and the Congo. We asked these community engagers about how to support others who would like to get involved in community work. Here is some of their advice and wisdom.

1. Develop a network to identify needs in the Newark and UD community that FPC-N might be especially well suited to address. How can FPC-N have the greatest enduring positive impact on the needs of the marginalized? Strive for opportunities with the potential for developing personal relationships.
2. Use a multi-pronged approach to encourage greater community engagement. Have spoken, written AND personal "asks". Work with spiritual gifts data to assist in "matching". Listen when FPC -N members come with a passion for a volunteer opportunity and then mentor them to discern if/how to follow through. Plan regular *Moments for Mission* to share stories and quickly summarize current volunteer opportunities.
3. Develop gentle expectations for lifelong "developmentally appropriate" volunteer connections both inside and outside FPC-N. The theologian Henry Nouwen said, "We are the windows through which others may glimpse God." *We're doing what we are called to do as Christians. We go not because we have a strategy for new membership; we go because we have a Savior who commanded us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. The stranger is not simply one who needs us. We need the stranger if we are to know Christ and Serve God in truth and love* (Vital Congregations). *Everyone* benefits from supportive personal connections!
4. Provide support for developing the skills and expectations for volunteering in ways that effectively meet community needs. Here is some wisdom from our community engagers:
 - Listen, respect, and give hope. People are not ready to hear until you build the connection and the trust.
 - They don't care what you know until they know you care. Listen to their "frightened brain" before speaking to their "learning brain."
 - Recognize there are many ways to do things—not just what you are used to.

- Re-energize small groups and fellowship opportunities where we can get to know each other and learn to share our faith journeys and challenges.
- Refresh and enhance our skills in listening and discussing difficult issues with each other.
- Consider collaborating with other churches, Stephen Ministers, and UD.

With those insights, the FPC-N/UD/Newark Community Linkages team sharpened our focus to 1) identify doable, tangible community needs, and (2) broaden congregational awareness, engagement, and support in addressing those needs. We strive to provide a strong foundation to help in reaching FPC-N's vision...*being vibrantly active messengers of hope, bringing the caring presence of Jesus Christ and love of God into our community and the wider world.*

We participate in The Newark Partnership and Interfaith Dialogues, which provide forums for identifying and collaboratively addressing community needs. Affordable housing shortages is an area of great concern that no one can solve alone; it is possible if we all work together.

Some great representatives attended the *St. John AM 175th Anniversary celebration* on Sept. 24 and we are working to build meaningful partnerships with this congregation.

From the *Delaware Population Consortium Projections* we learned that the 85-year-old+ population will continue to grow in our area—increasing the need for health care, housing, food security, transportation, emergency preparedness, and more thoughtful lifetime planning. UD's Kids Count provided additional data and insights about issues facing children and families in our community. Presbytery's databases (which will be updated within the next few months) can provide useful information on religious beliefs and aspirations in our community.

Our team explored with Rev. Dr. Tracy Kennan how we can most effectively increase our "range of motion" in the *4 Acts of Love*, and envision how we can use these skills to branch out as agents of light to "strangers" in our community—spreading God's love, kindness, hope, and joy.

Radical Hospitality—caring curiosity, acceptance, *helping foster a shared sense of belonging*

Fearless Conversations—talking about real-life issues where it is safe to be honest

Genuine Humility—seeking to understand, open to learning, open to hearing from people whose beliefs differ from ours, being willing to admit mistakes

Divine Anticipation—*believing that God is here and active in our lives, our world, our church.* When we anticipate God's presence and guidance, we may pay attention in a fresh way and see what might have eluded us before.

LifeSharing was offered as a six-week course by Dr. Traci Currie, who teaches *Creative Aging* for Delaware Division of the Arts, with assistance from The Rev. Dr. Tracy Keenan, Missional Presbyterian, New Castle Presbytery. As part of New Castle Presbytery's work on *Vital Congregations* and funded by Ignite, this pilot course helped develop our ability to listen to and connect with others. Half of the class was from the Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church. It was great getting to know them!

Kern Piser is a Read Aloud volunteer at the Newark Christian Child Care Center; the Head Start kids are extra appreciative! We think this may be a great opportunity for others.

Francis Kwansa represents us on the Ecumenical Campus Ministry Organization. This ministry is a partnership including the New Castle Presbytery, Episcopalian Diocese, and the United Methodist Church. The Ecumenical Campus Ministry seeks to secure a place on Main Street where UD students, faculty, and staff of all faiths can come to grow spiritually and find community, regardless of their religious affiliation or non-affiliation. Presbytery has approved the sale of LUMOS House and some of the proceeds may be available to fund this project.

Planning is nearly complete for upcoming [BrainWise](#) workshops, which will be led by a team from UD's [Center for Cognitive Aging](#) on 6 consecutive Mondays in Feb. and Mar., 2/12/24 through 3/18/24. Participants will develop a plan to improve and sustain their brain health. The power of FPC'-Ns group support will be deployed! Interested? Please email ptnelson@udel.edu soon!

Francis Kwansa, Ann Roybal, Kern Piser, and Pat Nelson want you to know that you are extremely welcome to join our team—we welcome kindred souls in this exciting work. To join us, speak with one of our team members or email ptnelson@udel.edu

Learning Ministry

Adult Christian Education

Melody Bock (Chair)

The Adult Discipleship class met on Sundays after worship service for the entire year, not even taking the customary summer break because we were enjoying the studies and fellowship too much to stop! With an average attendance of 12 people and a variety of topics through the year, the group was able to dig deeper into biblical, theological, and social issues, and get to know each other better. If you haven't attended, please join in this year!

Children's Education

Greg Hills and Darlene Newsom (Co-Chairs)

Sunday School continued January through May 2023 with the PC(USA) curriculum, *Growth in Grace and Gratitude*. When Sunday School resumed after the summer, we began with a new curriculum from The Sunday School Store entitled *Children's Ministry Curriculum*.

Our new curriculum has a different theme each month. In September, the children discussed what they pack in their bookbags like pencils, notebooks, etc. The children also were encouraged to pack their God-given supplies like peace, helpfulness, caring, sharing and many more qualities. In October, the children learned how so many of our city helpers like the police, grocery workers, and many more reflect Godlike qualities. November was devoted to thankfulness and December to Christmas Heroes like Joseph and Mary. We certainly look forward to the new themes for 2024.

Children come to the 10 am service with their parents. They participate in the service until Pastor Eric invites them up for the Youth Message. Afterwards, they leave with the teacher for the Sunday School classroom in the Lower Sanctuary. After the service, parents pick up their children downstairs. Last month, the children witnessed a baptism during the service in the sanctuary.

The Children's Learning Committee is comprised of teachers and assistants. Each member passed a background check and agreed to the Child & Youth Safety Policy. There is one Sunday School classroom with one teacher and one assistant each Sunday. The teachers are Greg Hills, Mimi Lovelace, and Faithe Koser. The assistants are Ann Ferreira, Ann Roybal, Mallory Kowalski, Pam Wunder, Sandy Wenner, and Peggy Hester.

There also is a nursery available for children four years old and younger. A trained employee is in the nursery each Sunday, along with an adult church member. The nursery has its own curriculum and abides by the same safety rules.

Boy Scout Program

Matt Reyne (Chartered Organization Representative)

The Boy Scout Program of First Presbyterian Church—Newark continued throughout 2023. Troop 56 continued to have weekly Troop meetings and monthly Adult Committee meetings in Memorial Hall. The Scouts participated in a number of outdoor service projects during the Summer months and even went to Summer Camp at Camp Rodney. Several of our Scouts attended the 2023 US National Jamboree and one Scout went to the 2023 World Jamboree in the Republic of Korea.

Cub Pack 56 also continued monthly Den and Pack meetings in Memorial Hall. The highlight of the year was a very successful Pinewood Derby held in Memorial Hall in March 2023.

The Boy Scout Program at First Presbyterian Church—Newark successfully completed its 79th year of providing traditional and relevant learning experiences for young girls and boys in our local community. Our church re-chartered Cub Pack 56 and Troop 56 for the year 2024 and is looking forward to a full year of program activities in 2024.

Supporting Ministry

Board of Trustees

Ron Olson (President)

2023 was a year of change, from a board of Trustees to a unicameral board including Session, where all Session members are trustees with officers President Ron, Vice President Don, and Secretary Nancy. Trustees are in charge lots of things. They schedule counting for our VIF & offering every week, maintain the buildings and grounds, approve group events with our partners scouts, recovery, musical, and others.

This past year we removed 12 large trees that were in danger of falling on the Newark Manor property. We also replaced our concrete walk from the handicap parking to the Memorial Hall building. Ron also signed contracts to have the additional handicap parking by the playground installed, perform complete sealing and restriping of the parking lot, and all the little things that we do behind the scenes such as repairing toilets, fixing pews, etc.

Westminster House is still sitting idle but interest has picked up and is promising. The recovery community's move from Westminster to Memorial Hall East has been very smooth and they are very appreciative to all of us.

Witnessing Ministry

Mission & Outreach

Bob Black, Jim Annett, Sarah Huckleberry, Ted Koser, and Mimi Lovelace, with frequent help and advice from Laura Sievert and Ann Roybal

The Mission and Outreach Committee (MOC) coordinates and supports various mission activities of First Presbyterian Church—Newark. One of its main tasks is to allocate funds for local and global mission projects from the Venture in Faith budget and other special funds. The committee also manages the income from several endowments dedicated to the church's mission work.

With the generous donations of church members, Mission and Outreach was able to financially assist Newark Empowerment Center, Habitat for Humanity, Meeting Ground, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and Newark Area Welfare. We also collected three special offerings during the year: One Great Hour of Sharing at Easter, the Peace and Global Witness offering in October, and the Christmas Joy offering. The Peace offering coincided with World Communion Sunday.

Alternative Gift Market- Report prepared by Jim Annett

Thank you all for your generous donations to the Alternative Gift Market that totaled \$1,841. We hope that you each feel blessed by what you were able to give. A comparison of our recent giving to this ministry is shown below:

2023	2022	2021	2019	2018	2017	2016
\$1,841	\$1,441	\$2,620	\$3,255	\$4,080	\$3,973	\$4,365

The AGM raised more in 2023, compared to 2022, with participation from more than 20 different individuals, contributing to 20 different line items. The largest Newark local giving was for Hope Dining Room at \$370. The largest world giving, \$526, was for the Dinanga Parish. A total of \$255 was given for local refugee resettlement. Thank you for your generosity to the recipients during this financial year. God has again answered our prayers. Thanks so much to Sarah Huckleberry who staffed the table and was the prime driver.

Other Activities

- Internationally, we supported the school of the Dinanga Church, our sister church, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Please read more about that ministry in a separate article later in this report.
- We continued to support Presbyterian mission co-workers. In particular, we support Doug Dicks in Israel-Palestine.
- Our church remains involved in Code Purple but we did not host again this year due to health concerns. Some church members volunteered at other churches which participated.

Mission and Outreach is glad that there are so many different groups in the church that support mission in so many ways. From our Presbyterian Women to our Refugee Committee, mission work is strong. MOC is pleased to support and organize and will continue to do so.

We are very grateful for the many members who generously contribute their time and money to the following organizations: Hope Dining Room, Meeting Ground, Newark Area Welfare, and Newark Empowerment Center.

Hope Dining Room

Willee Short (Chair)

In 2019 I wrote, "how can we be so happy cooking for 60 or 70 people." In 2023 I write, "how can we be so happy cooking for 35 - 45 people." The answer is we all like being at Hope. The clients are very dear to us and we hope that our numbers continue to rise. We continue to serve the same menu, and money has not been a concern for us. We spent \$996.13 on food, \$83 a month with contributions of \$375.

We Christmas wrapped socks, gloves, mittens, and hats that Rosemarie Beron knit. Again, thank you Rosemarie! The guests always appreciate the gifts and we love hearing their thank yous.

We mourn the loss of Pat Steele who was our number 1 cheerleader and best muffin maker. We thank our generous, gracious, and smiling volunteers: Stephanie Birdsall, Greg Hills, Kathleen Jolly, Jane McAlpine, Janet Myers, Vickie and Jim Pierson-Perry, and Willee and Paul Short.

Helping Hands

Sheila Anderson, Steve Hartwick, Amanda Kurian and Jynx Stevenson

Helping Hands is a small, informal committee that collects groceries for Newark Area Welfare, Kingswood Methodist Food Closet, and Meeting Ground's Wayfarer House. Newark Area Welfare and Kingswood Methodist Food Closet provide food for families in our community experiencing food insecurity. Wayfarer's House is a shelter for women and children located in Elkton, MD.

In 2023 we had 8 collections. The congregation donated approximately 120 bags of groceries and \$1125 in cash and check donations. Cash donations are typically used to purchase perishable items such as eggs and milk. Your donations are greatly appreciated by both the agencies that distribute them and the families that receive them. Your donations go directly to people in need in our community.

We are planning 8 collections in 2024 and appreciate the continued support of the congregation. We are especially indebted to Grace Laughinghouse, Sandra Wenner, and Pam Wunder for helping us with items in the bulletin and the Communicator. We also appreciate the support of Harvey Connor and Bob Black, who keep track of cash and check donations for us.

Community Outreach

**Don Tancredi, Nancy Lewis, Jim Pierson-Perry, Greg Hills, Harvey Conner,
and Sara Huckleberry**

Friends in Christ, this is just a short report on outreach, since we only started in the fall. We had a very successful Trunk or Treat. Session approved purchase of a new large lighted messaging sign that will let our neighbors know that we are alive and involved in their lives and the community.

But let's not look back. Let us look forward to 2024. What's the plan? Yoga and Zuma in Memorial Hall West, Easter egg hunt for the public, more concerts, more involvement with neighbor churches, and for all that pass our church, we will be a shining light and not hidden anymore.

Dinanga Parish—Our Sister Church

Jim Annett (FPC-N Contact) and Pastor Lazare Tshibuabua (Dinanga Church)

Dinanga Parish report for FPC-N (Pastor Tshibuabua with edits by Jim Annett)

1. Sharing information on Dinanga Parish
 - a. The church functioned well in calm and peace. The faithful grow in their faith and love to serve God. The congregation takes part in spiritual and evangelical activities prepared weekly by the church.
 - b. Our choirs are progressing well but the women's choir has worked better this year than the others. (There are also youth, young women, and young men choirs that also sing every week)
 - c. Dinanga Church has been in existence for 35 years in March 2024. We intend to organize on this occasion a service of actions (for retirement, should we call it that?) in favor of the first president of the women's council Presbyterians in our Parish. Her name is Astrid and she is now tired. We will do it at her request.
 - d. Rose, my wife, was Secretary of the Women's Committee at Dinanga Church and deacon last year.
 - e. 5 members of the parish died last year, including three men and two women.
2. Regarding the school:
 - a. In primary school there are 235 students for this school year 2023-2024
 - i. In 2022-2023, all 28 primary 6th grade finalist students passed the national test. Most of them benefited from FPC-N study fees.
 - ii. This year, 15 finalist 6th grade students out of 16 succeeded in the state exams. A girl stood out with 72%. (2022-2023)
 - b. The secondary school has 220 students, which has increased compared to last year. The computer center is now operational.
 - i. It currently has the following sections: Commercial management, Cutting and sewing, General education, and nutrition.
 - ii. This year there are 26 secondary school finalists.
 - iii. Computer science practice is done three times a week. The IT building attracted a good number of students.
 - iv. Practicing with sewing machines is better and more attractive.
 - c. Targeted students benefit from assistance from FPC-N. It is good to note that the Dinanga school is not yet supported by the Congolese government, parents continue to pay for their

children. The school has applied to be included into the government funded sector of schooling but the application is taking a long time for approval.

3. Finance Information 2023

- a. Total funds received: \$12,100
- b. February-March: \$2,000 for Bibles and general support
- c. March-April: \$1,500 for Easter season and School support
- d. August-September: \$2,600 for preparation for the 2023-2024 school year and other expenses
- e. October: \$3,000 for school study fees, school and general support
- f. December: \$3,000 for food crisis

4. Use of funds

- a. Needs of the Church
 - i. Purchase of Bibles: \$1,500
 - ii. Purchase of generator: \$400
 - iii. Assistance to widows: \$450
 - iv. Intervention in the fight against erosion: \$450
 - v. Food crisis: \$3,000
- b. School requirements and study costs
 - i. Enrollment fees and participation of secondary school finalists in the 2022-2023 state exams: \$550
 - ii. Study fees for University students (2022-2023): \$650
 - iii. Purchase 3 sewing machines: \$450
 - iv. Preparation for the start of the school year (2023-2024) for students (purchase of uniforms, school supplies and other expenses): \$1,250
 - v. Student study fees for the first quarter (2023-2024): \$850
 - vi. Digital registration fees and control of files for secondary school finalist students (2023-2024): \$450
 - vii. University student registration fees for the year (2023-2024): \$250
 - viii. Intervention to meet the various needs of Dinanga School (2023-2024): \$650
- c. Other expenses
 - i. Transportation and communication: \$250
 - ii. Moving and guarantee costs for the rental of the Pastor's house: \$600
 - iii. Unexpected: \$240

Initial Report on NCP Congo Trip 2023

Prepared by Laurie Loveless with edits by Jim Annett

Dates for trip: May 22- June 4, 2023

NCP Team: Tracy Keenan (NCP), Laurie Loveless (was Elkton PC), Brobbey Gyening (Olivet), Heather Thomson (Dover PC), Gary Willingham-McLain (Elkton PC), Jim Annett (FPC-N)

Purpose of trip: to visit churches and missions supported by New Castle Presbytery in Kananga Presbytery, experience firsthand their culture and circumstances, strengthen ties and share vision and plans for the future of our partnership.

Focus goals: strengthen relationships, empower women, and support and sustain existing ministries.

To Kinshasa:

We flew Brussels airlines from Dulles to Kinshasa via Brussels. Arranged with Jeffrey Travel to meet us there and help with protocol and drive us to MPH. They were efficient and timely. Arrived late at MPH. Warmly welcomed by Elisabeth Cameron, the current host there. Served light supper. Spent day Wednesday resting and meeting. Spent Thursday with driver visiting several sites. First, Maman Monique at FEBA (Women, Cradle of Abundance) and her women's center. She does a LOT with very little to train young women in sewing. Then visited "Chez Tin Tin", a "restaurant" on the Congo River.

To Kananga:

Met up with Jeff and Christi Boyd at the airport for CAA flight to Kananga. Again Jeffrey Travel transported us from MPH and did protocol through airport. Very helpful. At Kananga airport we were warmly greeted by a large entourage of our Kananga Presbytery partners. Many "mamas" joyfully welcomed us with signs, palm leaves and singing. All bags arrived except one small bag of Gary's (finally came Wednesday). We were able to use the UPRECO van all week to carry us and a number of our hosts. Another SUV was added (with working a/c for transport to other sites). English professor Honore Kapudi accompanied us the whole time to help translate. Even with Gary and I speaking some French and the Boyds speaking fluent French, we still had challenges communicating!

A FULL week in Kananga! We all stayed in single rooms at the Douze Maisons Hotel. A bit more comfortable than in 2015- electric on except from 1-6 am. Flushing toilets! But still bucket baths. Simon Ntumba and wife Therese provided hearty breakfast for several mornings, and we walked over to Protestant Center for breakfast the other mornings (and a few dinners). They were anxious for us to see the construction site for their new Presbytery office. We met with CPC leadership who helpfully spelled out how we could send funds. We visited ALL the parishes (we think to avoid jealousy) and were given gifts at each one. We gave to each of them a tote bag with NCP emblem. One day we divided into 2 groups to save time. We saw all the churches without buildings, some even without land. Of course, they ALL want sister-church partnerships. We visited the Dinanga School (partner with First Newark Church) and participated in the dedication of their new computer lab. We saw the well at Holy Mountain Parish (partner with Lewes church), and the line-up of people getting water. We met with the women and youth. We visited the palm field where trees were much bigger than in 2015. On Sunday we each preached in separate parishes and remained there most of the day.

At our request, and because it was Tracy's first time (as well as Brobbey, Heather and Gary's), we visited several CPC sites like IMPROKA and saw the remaining shipment of bibles. We left funds for every pastor to have a bible. We visited the PAX clinic in town, then drove to IMCK (got stuck in the sand and walked part way) and met with new director Dr. Jean Jacques and his staff. We drove out to the dam where we had brought equipment from Dr. Fletcher to fix a broken pump. We stopped by the nursing school to interview several students at the request of supporter Rev. William Bender from Knoxville. We spent a day in UPRECO and met many of the staff and were impressed by the girls' dorm and auditorium built by Myers Park Church. Also saw Dr Mulumba's tomb. We visited the office of SEPRES and were very impressed with the vocational training they are engaged in.

Wednesday afternoon we spent back with our sister churches. We were all adorned with beautiful dresses and shirts! That evening we met with their partnership committee to look over the 2023 budget and projections for 2024. Tracy did a good job explaining how the budget process worked and how important transparency and accountability were. Thursday, our last full day, we spent the morning meeting with their partnership committee to discuss our Covenant Agreement. We then hurried over to the Kananga One church for a closing worship service. Tracy presented our Presbytery gift of the altar cloth. We then had a farewell meal at the Protestant Center, which unfortunately was mostly in the dark by then, and we could barely see who was there! But we said our good byes and thanks and prayed for one another.

Back to Kinshasa:

We returned via CAA to Kinshasa and a quick overnight at MPH to rest and recuperate for the long trip home. Several children of pastors who attend university or work there came to visit us. They are an impressive group of young people. There are always so many interesting people staying at MPH involved with missions in many other parts of Congo from various church groups. Jeffrey Travel expertly got us to the airport and guided us through the check-in process. There was some issue with all the gifts we received, despite having documentation from our hosts, and we ended up having to pay an additional \$100 to clear them. Then finally we were on our way home.

Reflections:

Did we accomplish our goals? For the most part yes. Because of the time crunch and our own exhaustion, we barely had time at our few meetings to discuss budget and the covenant agreement, much less do relationship building. We asked for more rest time, but that only added to an already full agenda! Jeff and Christi were invaluable assets on our trip and kept reminding us to keep the focus more on relationship and less on money. They kept challenging us to ask how our funding impacted their local development. To show our mutual care and concern, we prayed for Pastor Thierry who developed malaria mid-week and has serious heart issues. We prayed for our Presbyteries and churches, and for their orphans, widows and prisoners. And they prayed for one of our family members who was having surgery.

Traveling on the roads was challenging and it took extra time to get everywhere. We were always late and they were always waiting! And it was ALWAYS hot. As the week wore on, we were inundated with personal requests from pastors and elders and hotel staff and wished we had discussed ahead how to handle these more equitably. All future requests will go through the executive Pastor Thierry for distribution. Yet we realized the best part of the trip was that we showed up. We came all this way because we care. Just our very presence gave them much hope and comfort. And we were grateful for how well they looked after us, often at great sacrifice. And we will never forget their joy amidst so much hardship. Their faith is deep because they depend on God for everything. When they hear of our shrinking churches, they ask us, "where are your evangelism teams...what are they doing to share the gospel and invite people to church?" We have much to learn from our partners and pray we can be faithful in our follow-up.

Other Congo items-

1. FPCN to walk with Olivet church in establishing a church-to-church partnership:

The Session recently approved partnering with the Olivet PC for a set time, 3 years, to match any gifts, up to \$500 per year, that they share with their new church to church partnership with the Apollo parish in the Kananga presbytery.

One of the folks on the NCP 2023 trip, Brobbie Gyening, is an elder at Olivet (and about to become a pastor) spoke regarding a partnership with the Apollo worship community in the KP (they are one of the churches without a building). Brobbie and I discussed walking with Olivet for up to 3 years and up to \$500 a year on our part. The \$500 would come from the MOC budget and/or balance sheet funds for special offerings or AGM. In theory, the giving from both churches would be matched by the NCP, which has been discussed with the NCP Missional Presbyter.

2. Presidential election in the Congo & political system overview (from NPR 12-31-23 article)

Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi won reelection with more than 70% of the vote, the country's election commission said Sunday (12/31/2023) as opposition candidates and their supporters questioned the validity of the results. The preliminary results of the Dec. 20 election were announced in the capital, Kinshasa, amid demands from the opposition and some civil society groups for the vote to be rerun due to massive logistical problems that they said had undermined the balloting.

Tshisekedi's overwhelming declared victory was likely to fuel those concerns. The second-place candidate was businessman Moise Katumbi, who received 18% of the vote. Martin Fayulu, who received 5%, finished third. Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, a physician renowned for treating women brutalized by sexual violence in eastern Congo, got less than 1%.

Congo has a history of disputed elections that can turn violent, and there's little confidence among many Congolese in the country's institutions. Before the results were announced Sunday, opposition candidates, including Katumbi, said they rejected the results and called on the population to mobilize. The logistical problems included many polling stations being late in opening or not opening at all. Some lacked materials, and many voter cards had smudged ink that made them illegible. Voting in the election had to be extended into a second day—something local observers and civil society organizations have called illegal—and parts of the country were still casting ballots five days after election day.

Leading up to and during the vote, the election commission was accused of not being transparent enough. The East African Community said its election observer mission was not granted access to Congo, and the European Union canceled its mission after authorities did not authorize the use of satellite equipment by EU monitors. Congo analysts say the thousands of observers that were in the country were unable to say whether the irregularities had an impact on the overall integrity of the results, leaving it to the election commission. Tshisekedi already has spent much of his time in office trying to gain legitimacy after a disputed 2018 election that some observers said Fayulu actually won.

Overall, Tshisekedi's track record has been spotty. He's struggled to stem violence in the east, a goal he campaigned on. Conflict in eastern Congo has raged for decades, with more than 120 armed groups fighting for power, resources, and to protect their communities. {Kananga, which is in the south-central portion of the country, with much less mineral wealth, has seen less violence- Jim Annett} But the violence has spiked during Tshisekedi's term with the resurgence of the M23 rebels, who have displaced millions of people and seized swaths of land. The fighting prevented 1.5 million people from registering to vote. Still, Tshisekedi's initiatives creating free health care for pregnant mothers and babies and providing free primary education, has changed the lives of some people living in remote villages. Congolese analysts said it's important to view Tshisekedi's win with caution given the significant uncertainty of the presidential election's validity.

3. Report from Pastor Tshibuabua on January 2, 2024 on flooding in Kananga:
- a. There has been a natural disaster in Kananga.
 - b. Let me inform you that last Tuesday, December 26, heavy rain which lasted for more than 12 hours caused several enormous damages including:
 - i. The death of 22 people, most of whom had their houses collapse on them.
 - ii. Landslides and house losses.
 - iii. Increased depth and width of ravines due to erosion
 - c. Some parishes of the presbytery are in danger because of erosion. The danger in the Dinanga parish is becoming more and more serious. Some neighbors are moving out. The ravine took the direction of the avenue, which in front of our church in Dinanga is already 10 or 12 meters away and behind the church it is 6 or 7 meters away. The Pastor's church behind the church collapsed into the ravine.
 - d. The Dinanga church is also already damaged, large cracks are visible on the walls and on the floor inside the church. The situation is becoming more and more serious. Dinanga Church decided to intervene behind the temple with the rapid planting of bamboo and the placement of bags filled with soil to prevent progression of this erosion with whatever means were available.
 - e. Until now this erosion has not been targeted by the Congolese government for remediation in our town of Kananga.



Ravine at Kananga



Outside of Dinanga

Worshiping Ministry

Worship

Carol Olson (Chair)

The members of the Worship Committee are: Judy Agnello, Larry Benson, Steve Breffitt, Interim Pastor Eric Markman, Carolyn Morton, Carol Olson and Jim Pierson-Perry

The Worship Committee continues striving to bring you a new and varied blended worship music experience utilizing the choir, praise band, and organ. This year choral students from the UD are singing in our choir to provide energy and strong voices. We are also making connections with the UD music department by having instrumentalists play during special worship services, further strengthening our ties with the University of Delaware.

The committee works with the minister to coordinate sanctuary decorations for each season so that services run smoothly. This includes: ushers, hanging of banners, changing altar cloths, preparing for communion, scheduling organists and other special musicians, and organizing the pews (pew pads, pencils, envelopes, and prayer cards).

A search team was formed this year to seek a Director of Music Ministries. Despite countless hours reviewing applications, holding meetings and interviews, that position has not been filled. We will repost the position in 2024, praying that God sends an applicant that is a fit for our congregation.

Thank you to all those who usher, greet and serve communion willingly when asked. You are a vital part of the worship service.

Chancel Choir

Leia Gibson (Chancel Choir Director)

2023 was full of growth and optimism for our church musicians. We performed over 350 songs in worship, community events, and celebrations. In December, our choir performed in the PW Christmas program titled "Make a Joyful Noise". Our choir and praise band welcomed new members this year, including two UD musicians who serve as section leaders of music in rehearsals and performances. We welcomed guest organ, brass, and string players to perform with us on special occasions. We continued weekly rehearsals, enhanced our sounds with added instruments and music technology, and elevated our musical contributions within our church community.

I am so proud of the collaborative efforts made by the choir and praise team musicians, bringing energy and compassion to every performance. The worship leaders have improved their communication efforts this year as well. Our music team remained optimistic and hopeful in the ongoing search for a permanent Director of Music, while being dedicated to musical praise every week through a shared love of singing. I look forward to seeing how much the music ministry continues to flourish in 2024.

Praise Band

Larry Benson (Praise Band Leader)

We finally ended the transitional period between interim pastor and permanent pastor by hiring Rev. Dan McKenty. However, finding an organist/choir director for the church has been equally challenging, as there have been few qualified applicants for the role. Despite these difficulties, the worship services have continued and the spiritual needs of the church have been met. We are grateful to God for His blessings.

Collaboration between the Praise Band and Choir is going well. Selecting music that complements both traditional and contemporary styles has been a fun challenge each week, and the results are enjoyable for all involved.

I offer my deepest gratitude to every person who contributes to the Sunday worship music. I appreciate the efforts of Melody Bock (vocals), Mark Sisk (guitar and vocals), Myles Thompson (piano and vocals and preaching), Dave Baker (bass and vocals), Alex Bock (drums), Jim Pierson-Perry (piano, synthesizer, and speaker of the house), Leia Gibson (vocals, choir director), and the entire church choir for their sacrifice, exemplary dedication, and commitment.

Thanks to Dave Evers and Andre “Dre” Corbitt for their outstanding performances on audio and video equipment and for making the YouTube stream so successful.

Once again, thank you all! I am looking forward to 2024 with excitement

Audiovisual (AV) Team

Jim Pierson-Perry (Chair)

The AV team spent 2023 improving our audio and video capabilities, as well as expanding our team roster. A major change came in August when we contracted with Andre “Dre” Corbitt to serve as our primary audio operator. Dre has significant experience with mixing and overseeing live sound productions. His trained ears and professional knowledge have greatly improved the audio quality both within the sanctuary and on our video recordings. Many church members have commented on our improved sound and we intend to get even better in 2024.

The video side also saw major improvements in both quality and capabilities, thanks to the countless hours of effort by Dave Evers. These include more sophisticated video shots with split screens, picture-in-a-picture, and titling of some scenes. Dave also installed a 4th video camera which gives great views of the organist, the central aisle, musicians, and more. Dave says that he’s got even more ideas for improvements in 2024—so watch this space!

In addition to Sunday services, the AV team assists with special events such as funeral services, weddings, and presentations, such as the recent PW Christmas event. Having the ability to provide a quality livestream lets us broadcast those events out to family and friends who otherwise might not be able to attend, as well as provide lasting video recordings.

Several new pieces of equipment were added to the AV system this year. These include an additional video camera, a second headset mic, multiple cables, and a mic for the sound booth to talk to Praise Team members via their in-ear monitors. We also migrated from regular AA batteries to rechargeable ones, which is both an environmental and economic improvement. These items were all purchased with private donations from church members—thank you!

Your AV Team Members are: Andre “Dre” Corbitt, Kaitlin Douglas, Dave Evers, Ted Koser, Beth Marshall, Jim Pierson-Perry, and Laura Sievert.

Staff, Worship, and Administrative Team

Interim Pastor

Rev. Eric Markman

Worship Team

Larry Benson, Praise Team Music Leader

Steve Breffitt, Handbell Director

Leia Gibson, Chancel Choir Director

Administration Team

Grace Laughinghouse, Office Administrator

Bob Black, Treasurer

Harvey Conner- Financial Secretary

Nancy Lewis, Clerk of Session

Jane Moore, Moderator Board of Deacons Ron Olson, President, Board of Trustees

Carol Olson, Pam Wunder, Co-Moderators, Presbyterian Women

Nursery Staff

Julles Stevenson

Missionary Co-Workers

South Sudan: Bob and Kristi Rice

Israel & Palestine: Doug Dicks

Sister Congregation

Dinanga Presbyterian Church, Democratic Republic of Congo