



first **UNITARIAN**
CONGREGATION OF TORONTO | *Est.* 1845

Annual Report July 2025-June 2026

473 Oakwood Ave, Toronto M6E 2W4

416-924-9654

FirstUnitarianToronto.org



Contents

[Letter from Our Board Co-Chairs, Tanya Cothran and Chris Lee](#)

[Letter from Our Interim Lead Minister, Rev. Linda Thomson](#)

[Our New Home](#)

[Programs and Initiatives](#)

[Eco/Justice Activities](#)

[Financial Overview](#)

[A Note of Gratitude from the Board of Directors](#)

[Principles of Unitarianism and Our Covenant](#)

Letter from Our Board Co-Chairs, Tanya Cothran and Chris Lee

We did it! With our dedicated volunteers, talented staff, and steady leadership of interim ministers Revs. Linda Thomson and Victoria Ingram, we have gathered (every week in person and online!), searched for (and found!) a new settled minister, and built the systems to make our (beautiful!) space functional and welcoming. Each Sunday, our hearts are full with the joy of so many new friends of all ages in our congregation as we continue to settle into our home at 473 Oakwood.



We are grateful to our fellow 2025-2026 Board

Members: Rich Bailey, Peter Brydon, Jill Caskey, Kate Cottingham, Brian Deming (who took over Rich Bailey's position mid-year), Helen Iacovino, Owen Smith, and Brigit Swenson. The Board reviewed and revised our Human Resources policy this year, updating it for clarity, legal compliance, and to keep aligning it with our UU Principles. Kate and Brigit also led this year's pledge campaign, for which we're very grateful. And, we remain deeply appreciative and grateful for the outstanding work of the Ministerial Search Committee which resulted in the hiring of a settled minister.

This year, Tanya Cothran will conclude her term as Board President. She shares, "It has been a pleasure to serve my community as Board President and then Co-Chair these past four years. Thank you for your support and your confidence in me during this time of uncertainty. I'll continue to see you around FirstU!"

Letter from Our Interim Lead Minister, Rev. Linda Thomson

What a joyful year in ministry this has been! Since August 24th, we've been able to gather for in-person Sunday services even as we take care to include those who participate virtually. In-person attendance continues to build while on-line attendance is high, more than is typical in other Unitarian Universalist congregations. It's especially heartening to see children in the community again.

I am deeply grateful to my colleague, Rev. Victoria Ingram, who provided spiritual care to congregants, supported the members of the Spiritual Care team, and preached one sermon per month. She also facilitated a monthly in-person Journey Group and edited the monthly theme packets for the Journey Groups. And, I remain grateful to the staff, Mary Anne Roche, Angela Klassen and Dallas Bergen, for helping me understand the congregation, and for the grace and flexibility they've shown during this period of transition.

While my role was half-time, I was able to work with worship leaders and congregational groups to plan special services, support the Search Committee by meeting with potential candidates to help them understand the congregation, host an "About UU and FirstU" session, and exchange pulpits with Rev. Sally Fritsche of Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

I am so grateful for the opportunity I've had to serve during this transition to your future.



Our New Home

[Real Estate Task Force](#) • [Building Operations](#) • [Ministerial Search Committee](#)

Real Estate Task Force

Karen Dunk-Green (Chair), Richard Kirsh, Beth Ann McFadden, David Priebe, Loo Russell, Greg Suttor

After 7+ years, this dedicated and collaborative team wound down in mid-2025, having completed its tasks of designing, contracting, monitoring, “FRETting” and problem-solving for the renovation of 473 Oakwood Avenue. The congregation expressed its deep gratitude during opening celebrations in August and September, and members are happy to finally be home!

Hooray!!

The overall relocation & renovation project was completed within the funds allocated by the congregation (by a vote on Nov 6, 2022), and within 7.7% of the original tendered prices from contractors (industry average is an average of 10-15%). With the relocation achieved and the approved funds spent, further property enhancements will now be considered alongside other needs by the Executive Committee and Board, with support from the new Property Management Team, using money from the Property Fund, Opportunities Fund, or annual maintenance budget.

Building Operations

Mary Anne Roche, Director of Administration

As we settle into our beautiful new building, members and friends are hard at work every day behind the scenes, providing the foundational structure that keeps our community informed, healthy and safe.

Our committed communications team focuses on keeping the FirstU community well-informed. Members are webmasters (Stan Yack and Mo MacMahon), First Light editors (Stephanie Bryant, Dacia Veinberga, Mo MacMahon) and social media editor, Sylvia Black.

Our amazing Sunday crew is made up of a dedicated coffee team of 16 members along with a dozen greeters and ushers. The crew includes Hope Paul, who manages our worship aesthetics, Matt Rideout, who provides professional AV service, Mo MacMahon who hosts the welcome table, and Juleth Dawson who purchases our dairy supplies.

We're able to keep our beautiful new building in an as new condition and safe thanks to our caretaker Alex Ndungu and our cleaner, Angel Gabriel Dominguez Garcia. The Property Management Team with members Karen Dunk-Green and Matt Rideout keep building furnishings and equipment in good working order. This work supports our room rental program which continues to grow.

Many thanks to all for their support, flexibility, and understanding during this first year of building operations.

Ministerial Search Committee (MSC)

Beth Ann McFadden (Co-chair), Loo Russell (Co-Chair), Judy Clarke, Maya Ferguson-Klinowski (2024/2025), Kim Saltarski, Harold Wright, Terri Marks (2025-2026)

The MSC was created in June 2024, one year after Rev. Shawn Newton departed. The search for an interim minister resulted in hiring Rev. Jonipher Kwan on a “contract-to-call” basis which put the MSC’s work on hold. In December 2024, Rev. Jonipher announced he’d be leaving Toronto in June 2024 so the committee was reactivated. The work took place in two stages, following the UUA’s carefully prescribed process for conducting a ministerial search. Each committee member was responsible for one or more elements of the process. The detailed timeline and workplan is available from the Committee Chairs.

During the first stage (January to December 2025), MSC focused on creating a congregational profile and determining the type of ministerial leadership that was desired. Congregational consultations included surveys, focus groups, and an anti-racism workshop. The MSC developed the questions and formats for interviews, and met with other Canadian congregations to learn from their search experiences.

During stage two (January to May 2026), the MSC reviewed applications, prepared assessment criteria, and held a series of virtual and in-person interviews. This work culminated in identifying a recommended candidate, who was introduced to the congregation in person during Candidating Week. On April 26, 2026, the congregation held a formal vote to call which resulted in 99.08% in favour of calling Rev. Alex Jensen as our new settled Minister. This was a joy-filled day!

Many thanks to the Congregation for your support and assistance during the search process.

Programs and Initiatives

[Building Connections with Oakwood Vaughan](#) • [Congregational Music Program](#) • [Lay Chaplain Program](#) • [Lifespan Religious Education](#) • [Spiritual Care Team](#) • [Transition Task Force](#)

Building Connections with Oakwood-Vaughan (BCOV) Committee

Catherine Lake (Chair), Sue Berlove, Judy Clarke, Karen MacDuffee, Nacia Miller, Lynda Robson, Gilbert Salgado

FirstU is becoming a recognized name in our neighbourhood as BCOV members continue to volunteer/attend community meetings and events, and most importantly, build relationships. BCOV activities include:

- Sue is active with OV Oasis for Health Aging including connecting seniors to our neighbours at For Youth Initiative (FYI) where they pair with a young person who tutors them in social media and the web — this has become a well-attended program
- Judy attends OV Community Organization (OVCO) board meetings, assists administratively, and has been invited to participate in a committee planning to negotiate a lease extension and more flexibility for the OV Community Hub
- Karen is with OV Neighbourhood Action Partnership (OV NAP) which connects FirstU to local organizations including advocacy groups for Black youth, the elderly, and affordable housing; City representatives and politicians; and businesses and residents
- Catherine attends Groundings in Little Xaymaca and outreaches to other Black-focused organizations which led to bringing guest speaker David Lewis-Peart to FirstU and helping connect us with the Jamaican-Canadian community to gather donations and fundraise \$2000 for Hurricane Melissa Relief.

We were delighted to see so many of our community friends at FirstU's Coffeehouse Cabaret!

Congregational Music Program

Dallas Bergen, Director of Congregational Music

We had a great start to the new congregational year making music in our beautiful new sanctuary for the first time. What a joy it was to rehearse in the same space as our worship services for the first time in three years—and to be reunited with our magnificent Steinway D concert grand piano! Thank you to our leaders and the congregation for continuing to support our music.

Musical highlights and milestones included:

- Guest Choir Clinician and former Resident Musician, **Lucas Marchand**, joined a string quartet to present *This Must Be The Place* in one of our first services in September
- Said farewell to **Adam Sakiyama** and seamlessly welcomed **Gregory Oh** as our Congregational Pianist

- Restabilized the choir to a dedicated core of twenty-four members and three professional resident musicians (**Joanne Chapin, Gaby Byrnes, Tom Lillington**)
- Transitioned the choir and choir library to a digital library and digital tablet use
- Hosted a Coffeehouse Cabaret night that included great performances from members and friends of our congregation; lots of fun, some money raised, great food, packed house! Thanks to **Owen Smith** and **Peter Brydon** for emceeing and coordinating, and to the many food/beverage volunteers
- Other musical guests: Alexa Belgrave, Cecelia NguyenTran, Michel Ross, Susanne Maziarz (pianists); Olena Ponpon, Woosol Cho, Brenna McLane, Bryan Holt (strings); Tahirih Vejdani, Darryl Huggins, Karen Weigold, Adam Wicks, Ianjai Mounsey, Jenna Cowans, Noelle Slaney (vocalists)

Lay Chaplain Program

Sue Meggs, Chair of the Lay Chaplain Committee

Our Lay Chaplain program continues our congregation’s tradition of offering rites-of-passage services to the wider public at competitive rates. This past year’s activity amounted to 10 services conducted by our two lay chaplains, Jennifer Beer and Kelly Ferguson. Since last August, Jennifer has taken a break due to an injury that she continues to recover from. We’re grateful that Kelly was able to cover services for both.

We are in the process of appointing a new lay chaplain who will train with the CUC and be mentored throughout her first year. We anticipate the volume of services to increase with room rentals available at our new building. With a new lay chaplain on the team and FirstU’s ability to accommodate services at 473 Oakwood, we think 2026 will be an exciting year for our program.

Lifespan Religious Education

Angela Klassen, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

Over the past year, 18 families with 27 children have found friendship and meaningful learning opportunities in our preschool nursery and All-Ages Religious Education classes.

Our commitment to multigenerational learning, exploration, and service came to life in many ways. We recreated the nativity story through a “pick-up pageant”, hosted browsing tables and shared hand-work projects supporting the congregation, the wider community, and our shared spiritual practice during coffee hour.

During worship, our Time for All Ages stories highlighted diverse authors, characters, cultures, and themes, reflecting our commitment to the 8th UU Principle.

Among youth and young adults, the congregation will hear the Coming of Age credo—an emerging adult’s statement of belief—this spring. Our in-person monthly Young Adult Dinners and two Journey Groups are consistently attended by approximately 15 participants aged 18–35.

We offer heartfelt thanks to the leaders of our affinity groups, who help sustain connection across the community, and to the approximately 120 members and facilitators participating in our 14 Journey Groups. We are also grateful to

Rev. Victoria Ingram for supporting our use of Canadian-curated reflection guides developed by the Meaning Making ministry team. This year's themes included change, truth, liberating love, and learning from ancestors.

As we look ahead, we extend deep gratitude to the staff, leaders, volunteers, and members whose commitment, resilience, and grace continue to guide us. We look forward to the opportunities for service and connection that await us in our new neighbourhood.

Spiritual Care Team

Angela Klassen, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

First Unitarian's Spiritual Care Team (SCT) provides confidential support for members and friends of the congregation during times of transition, discernment, loss and varied life passages. Lay members of our team extend the care provided by our ministers and were supervised this year by Rev. Victoria Ingram, as approximately 28 people received direct, one-on-one care this year.

Our team welcomes members and friends who may benefit from one-time support or a series of three to five meetings, whether in person, by phone, zoom, email or text. Certified through the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Lay Spiritual Care training program, each team member's background is also checked. Team members this year were Rev. Linda Thomson, Donald Cole, Tanya Cothran and Jane Larimer. We also extend our deep gratitude to Barb Wentworth whose service concluded in the 2025-26 year.

On behalf of the congregation and as a colleague serving on the team, thank you to the Spiritual Care Team for the commitment each team member offers to honing their skills, and to the quiet but powerful ministry of deep listening.

Transition Task Force (TTF)

Karen Dunk-Green (Chair), Wendy Dines, Calvin Drake, Sandy Henbest, Stephanie Hodnett

The TTF bid farewell to interim Minister Rev. Jonipher Kwong in June 2025 and welcomed Rev. Linda Thomson as FirstU's part-time Lead Minister for this congregational year.

We supported Rev. Linda as she planned her orientation to people in key roles at FirstU, and held periodic meetings to discuss how the congregation's needs were being served by its rituals, processes, and structures. Rev. Linda's emphasis quickly focused on supporting the congregation in feeling at home and finding its way into new ways of being at 473 Oakwood. The TTF shared information with the Ministerial Search Committee to help build a "congregational profile" for prospective ministers. Currently, the Task Force is discussing ways to ensure a thorough handover of stable processes/routines as well as a list of future considerations that will help FirstU's next settled Minister continue to build the strength of our congregational ministry.

Eco/Justice Activities

[Amnesty International Group 142](#) • [Green Sanctuary Group](#) • [Reconciliation Working Group](#) • [Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement Program](#)

Amnesty International Group 142

Ted Wood (Chair), Kate Cottington, Scott Forsyth, Beth Guthrie, Hanna Hagar, Nimira Lalani, Paul Mitchell, Wendy Prezament

Amnesty Group 142 campaigns to stop and prevent human rights abuses with our primary focus on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in support of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We called on Canada to pass Bill C-61 to ensure clean drinking water for First Nations. We supported the rights of Sami communities in Norway and Indigenous communities in Honduras.

We called for a variety of actions including Israel to stop evictions in East Jerusalem, the United States to stop the crackdown on international students, Tunisia to drop charges against a human rights lawyer, Ecuador to protect young climate defenders, and the international community to take action against human rights violations in Afghanistan.

On December 14, we celebrated International Human Rights Day focusing on the universality of human rights, and participated in Amnesty's annual Write for Rights campaign. Our group meets virtually once a month to plan activities. We are thankful for the ongoing support of the congregation for the extremely important human rights work of Amnesty International.

Green Sanctuary Group (The Green Team)

Linda Heron, Chair

The Green Sanctuary Group (certified since 2011), works with the congregation to realize our seventh principle (the "interconnected web of all existence") and consists of Gwen Harris and Linda Heron. Marg Wiebe has left after many years of service. Thank you Marg!

Although the team is small, there is underlying support/interest from the congregation in caring for the Earth, Climate Change, and biodiversity. Plus, we enjoy collaborations with the Reconciliation Working Group, Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, and Amnesty – our mandates interact and connect through our first, second, sixth and eighth Principles. We are stronger together!

We continue to provide biweekly Green Moments in First Light (since 2007) to inform and encourage members' actions for the benefit of the Earth. For example, 26 members/friends signed letters to the federal government to continue to fund Canada's Nature Strategy which was due to end March 31, 2026. Success! In April, the federal government announced \$3.8 billion funding for Canada's Strategy to Protect Nature.

Thank you to the Board and Worship Service Committee for responding to our request for more inclusion of Earth-related themes and quotations in our Sunday services. These remind us of our deep nourishing connections.

Reconciliation Working Group

Active members: Doug Buck, Maya Ferguson Klinowski, Joseph Muller, Gilbert Salgado (co-facilitator), Melanie Willson, Wendy Youens (co-facilitator), Donald Cole (spot volunteer)

This was a year of transition with Doug Buck retiring after many years of dedicated service, new members joining, and a number on leave due to other FirstU or personal commitments. RWG's mission is "to inform, to engage and to inspire action."

Together we:

- Researched and created FirstU's current Indigenous Land Acknowledgement.
- Informed the congregation through the updated Truth Before Reconciliation: Indigenous Learning Resources, First Light entries, and the weekly email distribution.
- Engaged in solidarity with Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society by attending their Healing Lodge Conference, supporting the Turkey Drive, and sharing the March 8th service with Patti Pettigrew and the congregation fundraising towards her vision. Thank you.
- Collaborated with like minded organizations to lift up the needs of Indigenous initiatives including Grassy Narrows pursuit of mercury justice, Kingston UU support for Treaty 9, co-facilitating with Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 52 Ways to Reconcile book group and partnering with St. Matthew's United Church on "We Are All Water Protectors".



Some members of the Reconciliation Working Group – April 2026

Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement Program (RSSP)

Sayed Aga, Susan Bondy, Peter Brydon, Karen Dunk-Green, Chris Lowry, Meredith MacFarquhar, Elizabeth McRae, Sue Meggs, Paul Palmer, Wendy Peebles, Ed Thompson, Beth van der Weerd

We were pleased to sponsor Sayed, an Afghan refugee, this year. Sayed is an ambitious, hard-working young man who is going places. The sponsorship team helped him get oriented, housed, health and dental care, ESL tutoring, and employed as an auto mechanic. Sayed is excited to be in Canada where he has a safe home, friends, freedom of movement and the ability to work, improve his skills, and to provide some support to his family in Afghanistan. A dedicated team of 15 volunteers and congregational donations and support made this possible.

This year we also co-sponsored, with community and family support, a Syrian man, an Eritrean man, and a Syrian woman and her daughter. We have applications in process to co-sponsor another 18 refugees.

It's been a great year for FirstU's Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement Program!



Members of the Refugee Sponsorship and Settlement group with Sayed helping him move into his apartment – March 2025

Financial Overview

[Financial Report](#) • [Financial Sustainability Committee](#) • [Funds Management Committee](#)

Financial Report

Bill Dunk-Green, Financial Coordinator

This past year, the Finance Team worked collaboratively to ensure the Congregation's fiscal health and transparency. The team is made up of Bill Dunk-Green (Treasurer & Finance Coordinator), Winnie McDonagh (Receivables & Donor Relations), Mo MacMahon (Donations & Pledges), and Jan Mahood (Accounts Payable). Together, we successfully managed all essential financial tasks and reporting.

Key Highlights & Innovations

We are thrilled to have instituted **TipTap** for the Congregation this year. This modern "touch-to-give" system was a success, bringing in over **\$4,000** in digital donations.

Our Shared Impact

Your generosity extended far beyond our walls. Through your contributions, the Congregation provided vital support to several **designated charities**, making a tangible difference in our broader community. These were:

- Amnesty International: \$425
- Jamaican Hurricane Relief: \$1,960
- Flaming Chalice: \$3,120
- For Youth Initiative: \$320
- Sharing Our Faith: \$410
- Thunder Woman Healing Society Lodge: \$7,135

Legacy of Giving

We are also profoundly grateful to have received four **bequests** from members and friends, totalling \$114,423. These legacy gifts are a testament to the deep connection our community shares and provide a foundation for our future growth.

Looking Ahead

As we close this fiscal year, we remain committed to stewardship that honors our values and strengthens our mission. We thank you for your unwavering financial support.

Financial Sustainability Committee (FSC)

Bill Dunk-Green (Treasurer), Karen Dunk-Green (Chair of FSC and Chair of FRET), Greg Suttor (FRET Finance), Mary Anne Roche (Director of Administration)

The FSC supported the Board and the Treasurer in their financial stewardship roles by performing the analysis outlined below and by meeting with the Board throughout the year to discuss short and long-term financial health.

The FSC's focus included:

- cashflow forecasting, to ensure enough "cash" on hand to cover immediate expenses
- expense forecasting, particularly re the final year of the 473 Renovation project
- additional long-term forecasting and analysis to set targets for the annual donation campaign and to enable budgeting for a fulltime Minister's contract.

In a report to the Board in January 2026, the FSC recommended a series of financial targets to be aimed for over the next 3-5 years to proactively rebuild FirstU's funds, including the annual Operating Fund and our investments comprising the Property Fund, Opportunities Fund, and Mission Fund. There are opportunities in the area of membership development, rental development, and legacy giving development.

Funds Management Committee

Jack MacFadden, Chair, Owen Smith (Board Liaison), Bill Dunk Green (Treasurer)

Jack McFadden assumed the Chair from Garrett MacLean in the spring of 2025. The majority of the first year was spent analyzing the needs of the Committee, as the dollar value of funds to be managed dramatically dropped after our investment in our new building at 473 Oakwood. The Nominating Committee is currently looking for another member to join the Committee.

The total value of the funds on March 31, 2025, when Jack assumed the Chair was \$668,842. In June, 2025 the following disbursements were made from the funds, in accordance with our agreements with the CUC, and in compliance with our bylaws:

Rouff/Mackie-Jenkins Fund (Theological Education)

- Opening Balance (July 1, 2024): \$329,635
- Total Investment Income: \$9,816 (\$7,298 realized; \$2,518 unrealized)
- Less Inflation Adjustment (1.83%): (\$6,032)
- Total Available for Distribution: \$3,784

Foundation Fund (Sharing Our Faith)

- Opening Balance (July 1, 2024): \$109,182

- Total Investment Income: \$3,251 (\$2,417 realized; \$834 unrealized)
- Less Inflation Adjustment (1.83%): (\$1,998)
- Total Available for Distribution: \$1,253

The last balance for this fiscal year as of March 31, 2026 is \$653,663. The \$15,179 decrease in total fund value stems from significant global issues affecting bond and stock holdings in the first quarter of 2026. Funds will continue to be monitored and kept in compliance with our bylaws and UU values.

A Note of Gratitude from the Board of Directors

FirstU depends on the generosity and goodwill of members and friends for the delivery of our programs and services. We gratefully acknowledge the rich contribution of all our working groups and committees to the life of the Congregation. Detailed information on their initiatives and ways to get involved can be found on our website.

To our many donors, we extend our deepest appreciation for your belief in the power of community to build greater love and justice in the world.

And to members of the Unitarian network, including the Canadian Unitarian Council and the Unitarian Universalist Association, your steadfast friendship and encouragement is invaluable.

Principles of Unitarianism

As Unitarian Universalists we covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part;
- Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion in ourselves and our institutions.

Our Covenant

Love is our doctrine,
The quest for truth is our sacrament
And service is our prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
To serve life,
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the
divine.
Thus do we covenant with each other and with all.

