



**VISTA GRANDE COMMUNITY CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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GO and do the same - Luke 10:37

We are:
An Open and Affirming
Congregation

We believe:
God's Love is for
All the People

We listen:
God Is Still Speaking

Congregation at work throughout 2016 ...

OUR PURPOSE

We are a caring church for thinking people, an inclusive community of faith, united in our common quest to know God, inspired by the spirit of Jesus, and committed to sharing that love in ways that will make a difference in the world.

Congregation at work throughout 2016

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PASTOR'S REPORT

Rev. Clare Twomey

Given all that we have accomplished this past year, this report could take up pages and pages enumerating all of the exciting and challenging endeavors of the past year! Included are the highlights.

The year started with continued conversations with Shine of Remembrance (SOR) after the congregation agreed to pursue sale of the building. While the property was valued at 1.5 million by local commercial real estate sales, we agreed to offer it to SOR for 1.1 mil., based on the original base price and the current consumer price index. SOR felt that the price we were asking was too high and opted not to purchase at that time. We attempted to sell publically to assess interest in the property. This past fall, another attempt was made to invite SOR to purchase given their urgency to buy last year. Again, they declined, at which point the real-estate group (part of facilities task force) and the Steering Committee made the executive decision to stay in our present building until at least 2019. SOR will have one last opportunity to purchase in 2019. This decision was made in order for us, as a congregation, to focus on the ministry and interfaith plans of our church and not be further distracted by the ambivalence of SOR's interest.

In keeping with the forward thinking of our congregation, we entered into conversations with High Plains Church (HP) last spring to determine the interest and feasibility of creating an interfaith community in the North End of Colorado Springs. These conversations have been very productive and have led us to be in an ongoing relationship with HP as we determine our futures together. It is the intention of both communities to maintain our identities while living into our theological diversity. We have ongoing monthly meetings with our Vision Groups in addition to weekly conversations (sometimes more!) with both pastors. Both congregations have employed the services of Gregg Carlson from the Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR) to help us through the process of becoming an interfaith community. We have joined in pot luck, Pride Day preparations and Pride March, holiday party and joint worship. In addition, Theology on Tap is a program that has been established between both congregations in order to get to know one another and engage in theological conversations in an informal setting. Initially, it was an option for Vista Grande to consider sharing space with HP but this plan has been reversed as we have determined it is better to remain on our property until 2019. As such, HP is currently exploring the option to move in with us!

In addition to coaching from CPR, this pastor also participated in an intensive leadership training in Atlanta this past summer so as to be more informed on how best to live into our revisioning identity. This rebranding of our church has also allowed us to apply for and be awarded two separate grants to assist us with our endeavors. We have been awarded a startup grant through the United Church of Christ of \$7,000 for the next year. These funds are to be used for identified startup costs; e.g., web site revisions, internet availability, identifying banners for our church, upgrade of supplies etc. to assist in our success. In addition, we have also been awarded a three year grant to assist with the pastor's benefits allowing us to focus on raising our stewardship monies to be used for our ministries and overall costs. And finally, because of our hands-on approach to ministry and mission we can now qualify for 'In the

Mud' grants offered by the Rocky Mountain Conference. With these grants come great congregational responsibilities in order to be true to the confidence in our vision demonstrated by our Conference and the UCC.

While we have named 'Interfaith' as a priority with regard to the future of our church and of church in general, identifying as a Revisioning/Renewal is not contingent on our relationship with High Plains. We have worked very diligently on restructuring our Missions program to become more actively involved on an everyday basis with those missions we have identified as being important to this congregation. In addition, we have become more aware of what it means to be a group that supports missional activities that promote the dignity and integrity of those we serve rather than contributing to a toxic relationship. Our missions folk have become more hands on with our mission partners and continue to be diligent on how to best be of help.

We have established Task Forces (TF) this past year which have allowed us to focus on specific goals in a timely manner. These task forces are: Facilities, which includes a Real-estate sub group working with SOR; Missions; Faith Formation for all ages; and Worship. Thus far these have been very successful and allow for everyone to engage according to their talents and interests. Anyone can join a TF at any time.

Faith Formation continues to evolve. This past year has seen the initiation of multigenerational worship each Sunday; the inclusion of Ayya Dhammadhira, an ordained Buddhist nun, who has begun teaching classes at VG; ongoing book studies and theological discussions with Sunday morning's Percolate group; Theology on Tap; monthly Faith Formation classes for kids and families; and adult Bible study to resume in the new year.

We have said goodbye to a few faithful souls: Max and Maurine Hale have found a nourishing faith community in their current community; Trish King was transferred to the North West and has found a UCC community there. She still stays in close touch. Eleashia Martell and her three kids also moved to Washington State. And David Rodriguez has moved on to focus on his faith journey at his own pace. He remains a close friend to this church as has recently stopped by to offer his love and support. Diane and Nathan Martin have transferred to Green Mountain Falls as Diane was called as their settled pastor. Brenda and Jimmy Collins continue to identify VG as their church home and surprise us occasionally by showing up Sunday mornings when visiting from Arizona. And Maggie and Ron Forth, while they make their home in New Mexico, also identify VG as their home church. It's with great joy that we welcomed Sandy Gates, Kathy Romberg, Eduardo and Melissa along with Gabriel, Xachary and Evelline, as new members. In addition we welcomed Rosemary McBride and Ellen Barry as transfers to VG.

We have had guest speakers who provide us with information regarding local missions and issues; we have been protested because of our dedication to social justice issues; we have had a change in how we do stewardship; and we've celebrated the 90th birthday of our dear Lucille and the presence of the beautiful children that our foster parents Dawn and Jacque share with us.

This small yet mighty church has been identified as a leader in our Conference by our Conference Minister Sue Artt as we have taken the lead in demonstrating what it means to be the Church in the 21st century. So far so good but so much more to do.

Vista Grande continues to embody what it means to be disciples because those participating in the life of this church have committed themselves to do justice, love mercy, and to walk each day humbly with our God.

Gratefully submitted, Rev. Clare Twomey

MODERATOR'S REPORT

Erin Elkaim

Hi, VGCC family! What a year 2016 has been! We've seen folks come and go and had many changes throughout the year. But our focus on our vision, and who WE as Vista Grande Community Church UCC want to be, is and always will be our priority.

We've listed our building for sale and talked with Shrine of Remembrance (SOR) about purchasing prior to 2019. We've discussed sharing space with High Plains Church Unitarian Universalists. We've recently discussed them sharing space with us. Ultimately, we have taken the property off the market, and told SOR that we aren't selling until 2019. Whoa! That's a lot of uncertainty. We know where we will be for the duration, until 2019. We can now focus on our VISION, which will bring many new and exciting things to VGCC.

Thank you, for sticking with us. We know that fear of the unknown is a scary concept. We will make it through whatever is thrown at us and persevere. We ARE Vista Grande Community Church and I can't wait to see what we accomplish in 2017!

STEERING COMMITTEE - ASSISTANT MODERATOR'S REPORT

This year we had three positions to be filled for the 2017 Steering Committee.

Steering Committee 2017

- Moderator: Erin Elkaim (2nd term)
- Asst. Moderator: Jacque Bechthold-Blueitt
- Treasurer: Vacant (2 year term) Past Treasurer: Nancy Morlock-Hollins
- Financial Secretary: Jeannie Harrington
- Clerk: Dawn Bechthold-Blueitt
- Member at large: Vacant (2 year term)
- Member-at-large : Deborah Tinsley

We are hopeful these positions will be filled at Annual Meeting, Jan 29, 2017.

CHURCH CLERK'S REPORT

The Steering Committee had a full slate of members this year and met 12 times during 2016 for monthly check up and planning meetings. Business of the church was dealt with and finances were discussed.

There was one congregational meeting held to approve the 2015 Annual Report, vote on nominations, and hear a report on the SOR relationship.

The Korean Church continued to use our space at 11:45 a.m. on Sundays. Exciting things are in our future as we proceed with our collaboration with multi faith groups. Please consider joining this committee and help in shaping our steps into the future!!

ADMIN REPORT

Donna Bristow

In continuation of completing our child safe policy, we performed background checks through Praesidium, Inc, contracted through our UCC Insurance Board and viewed online "safe church" training modules through Armatus.

Personnel Update: We had two staffing changes. Dixie Shipp-Napier, our music director from 01/01/16 – 05/22/16 resigned her position at VGCC due to personal reasons. Dena Morris, our nursery attendant from 04/05/15 to 06/19/16 resigned her position at VGCC to pursue a career as a hair stylist on the Western Slope of CO.

Vicki Norris, who was our supply music director until we hired Dixie Shipp-Napier, stepped in once again until we hired David Hudson.

Dani Diaz began employment as our nursery attendant on 07/17/16 and David Hudson as our music director on 10/01/16. Our children love Dani's gentle presence and the choir has shared new choral pieces under David's leadership.

Lease Agreement: The Shrine of Remembrance (SOR) continued to lease South Hall. SOR has the option to purchase the property in 2019.

MEMBER-AT-LARGE REPORT

Submitted by Phil Puterbaugh

In 2016, Phil Puterbaugh served the second year of his two-year term.

The following items were addressed by Phil during 2016:

Biblical "Then and Now" Maps of the Middle East - Phil researched online sources, purchased and donated "Then and Now" maps of the Middle East as reference material for the church.

Music Director Job Description - Phil drafted a new job description for Vista Grande Community Church's Music Director position.

Interim Pianists and Music Director - Phil provided connections to Vicki Norris and Dave Hudson as interim pianists for church services. Dave Hudson eventually became the church's new Music Director.

Vista Grande Community Church Main Building Contents Inventory - Phil suggested that, in lieu of the church's plans for possible relocation, an inventory of contents may need to be prepared. He volunteered for that, and completed the inventory in 2016.

MEMBER-AT-LARGE REPORT

Submitted by Deborah Tinsley

The Member at Large position has no specific 'duties', but is one to keep eyes and ears open and be accessible to all members, bringing any concerns, challenges and joys to the attention of the Steering Committee.

In the last year, I have represented both concern for the growing collaboration with High Plains Church Unitarian Universalist as well as the strong sense of excitement that has been expressed.

After the demonstrators and the Facebook harassment, I initiated a Safety Presentation for the Steering Committee, featuring Officer Brent Ambuel of the Colorado Springs Police Department. This was held on 3 October 2016.

The overwhelming expressions of members that I've heard in this last year are ones of appreciation for:

- the often challenging and always vibrant leadership of Pastor Clare
- the choir and the leadership from David Hudson, our new Music Director
- the continuing steady and sure professionalism Donna brings to all she does as Administrative Assistant as well as her work as church member, Association and Conference activist
- the book and bible studies
- the calm, consistent and joyful leadership of our Moderator, Erin Elkaim
- the very real sense of a committed, fun loving, welcoming community that is Vista Grande.

Vista Grande has survived many challenges in its forty year history; there is a real sense of thriving that has been present in the last year, and with the help of God and all the members, thriving is what we will be doing in the year to come. - Member at Large 2016 - 2018

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Submitted by Dave Bristow

The team of Dave Bristow, Carol Burbank, Jim Price, and Nancy Morlock-Hollins became the Pastoral Relations Committee early in 2016.

“The Pastoral Relations Committee is a standing committee in a local church that seeks to support and maintain an open and healthy relationship between the pastor and members of the congregation. The committee serves in two primary ways; as an advisory group to the pastor and as support for the pastor's leadership. As an advisory group the committee shares ideas, dreams, hopes, expectations and concerns of the congregation with the pastor. As support for the pastor, the committee interprets roles, functions, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.”

On January 31 2016, we installed Pastor Clare as our settled pastor. On several occasions during the year we met with Pastor Clare. Working with the Rocky Mountain Conference, we developed a "Vitality and Clergy Excellence Survey" that will be provided to all VGCC members and friends early 2017.

Vista Grande Vision Group

Submitted by Deborah Tinsley

Member of the Vision team

Since March 2016, Jim Price, Jeannie Harrington, Kathy Romberg, Lyn Gunning, Carol Burbank, Deborah Tinsley, and Erin Elkaim (as liaison between Vision Group and Steering Committee) have been meeting, along with Pastor Clare, to enhance and expand our church's partnership with the community through our ; commitment to effective missions; progressive biblical theology; open and affirming status; and genuine, gospel directed action so as to authentically live into our relationship with our Beloved.*

To this end, the Group investigated a relationship with The Center for Progressive Renewal: the Steering Committee later contracted with the Center. The Vision Group identified grants, and members were engaged through the summer developing a grant application and applying for a grant. The Group identified areas in which the church could improve, such as doing training with ushers, greeters, teachers for young, and for the adults; being more involved with the immediate neighborhood by flooding it with information about the church; simplifying the By-laws and bringing them up to date; introducing multi-generational worship; beginning a search for a more adaptable structure; investigating collaboration with other faith groups that share our values.

In May, a conversation was begun with High Plains Unitarian Universalists, a visit to their facility was arranged, and an understanding evolved that we would both like to be in a working relationship. Over the next months, an original, bold and creative vision emerged of an Interfaith Center, where Vista Grande, High Plains and other denominations would join for purposes of programing, mission, and ministry. This collaboration would be based on shared values, rather than shared faith.

As way of introduction to the two congregations, in July High Plains and Vista Grande collaborated with a pot luck at High Plains, a worship service, and participated together in the Pride Fest Parade.

In August, a Covenant was established with High Plains, to wit:

We are nurturing a caring and inclusive process by

Listening to each other,

Engaging in courageous conversations

Including fun and humor

Respecting each other

Assuming best intentions

Committing to see the largest potential for all involved while respecting each other's identities.

This will be done in the spirit of humility, vulnerability and grace.

It was in August as well that sub groups began to be established to deal with particular areas, such as finances, facilities, fellowship, social justice/mission, and fundraising as the vision of collaboration began to take shape.

In September, over twelve different non-profit groups and faiths were identified, with both Rev. Clare (VG) and Rev. Dana Lightsey (HP) taking on the task of approaching each of them with the concept of collaboration in an Inter Faith Center or Inter Faith Coalition. The first time the prophetic word was voiced was in this meeting, when ideas for more classroom space at Vista Grande was contemplated, when a group member said "YURTS!"

October 6th at 6:30 p.m. was the first time *Theology on Tap* occurred (an idea on how to reach out to those in the community who tend to not attend 'church') at the Whistle Pig Pub and Brewery; both VG and HP taking part.

At the November meeting, logistics began to be addressed, should HP decide at a future date to move in with VG at the VG facility. With the upcoming holiday season beginning to impact schedules, a hiatus was decided until into the new year.

*Vision statement May 2016

LOVE GROUNDED IN FAITH AND HOPE

WORSHIP

Submitted by Carol Wisely-Puterbaugh

The newly formed Worship Task Force began meeting in October. Some of the areas of worship in which we have been actively involved include the formation of multi-generational worship activities, assisting with Communion, updating seasonal banners for the sanctuary, and discussing various changes to the Order of Worship. Ornaments were selected and purchased for the 40th Anniversary of Vista Grande Community Church (1976-2016). The ornaments were distributed after the Christmas Eve Service. If anyone has ideas to share with the Worship Task Force, please contact any of our members listed below. We are always open to new ideas for expanding our worship!

We thank Rev Jim Price and Crystal Karr, our member in discernment, for doing pulpit supply while Clare was on vacation. We were pleased to hear about Casa de Paz from Sarah Jackson and Family Promise from Luke Cammack. Sarah and Luke shared their passion for ministries offering shelter for folks involved in the immigration battle and family homelessness.

Worship Task Force Members: Carolyn Gunning, Sandy Gates, Lori Gardner, Crystal Karr, Carol Wisely-Puterbaugh, and Pastor Clare Twomey

VGCC Choral Music

Submitted by David Hudson

The choir closed out 2016 on a high note (no pun), and my first term as VGCC Music Director has been a source of pride and personal challenge.

After a few years of piano lessons, I landed my first gig at the ripe old age of 16. Yet my decades of professional experience seldom involved any need to read manuscript. The last time I did any serious reading was as the accompanist for my college jazz choir back in the early 80's. The big difference was that jazz choir would meet several times a week over multiple months to rehearse the same dozen or so tunes, then perform them over and over at numerous shows; I ended up being able to play most everything from memory. With the VGCC choir, we learn a new song Wednesday evening, practice it again Sunday morning, and then perform it once during Sunday service. We start over the next week with something new; there's no getting around the fact that I must absolutely read music real-time at every performance. It's a struggle and I've so far avoided making any major mistakes (knock on wood), and I truly appreciate the patience and understanding of my choir mates! I have a long way to go and it's going to take time, but I feel truly blessed by this opportunity VGCC has given me for personal growth.

The choir did a fantastic job throughout Advent including the High Plains/Vista Grande Christmas party, the Las Posadas event, and the Christmas Eve music program. The Christmas party was held at High Plains Church and featured various soloists, a joint HPC/VGCC choir performance of *Carol of the Bells*, and a group sing-along of traditional carols. An enjoyable fellowship was had by all and the selection of good food and desserts was simply outstanding. Everyone got into the act for the Las Posadas event as we made our way to the various inns followed by the breaking of a piñata and a Mexican feast. The choir was delighted to have Lori Gardner's son Kevin join in during the Christmas Eve program and Carol Burbank treated us all to a lovely solo performance of *Mary, Did You Know?*

Moving into the New Year, the choir will soon begin making plans for VGCC's first ever Jazz Sunday in celebration of Mardi Gras in late February. Still too early to say what's going to happen, but whatever we come up with, it's surely going to be a lively upbeat performance!

FAITH FORMATION

Vision for Christian Education aka Faith Formation

VGCC will provide stimulating, participatory educational experiences for all ages – children, youth and adults. Shared discoveries may include bible studies, study of church history, literature and other media that nurture our spiritual growth. While our educational experiences may be held at different venues we will seek to connect our learning to our daily lives.

Kids' Faith Formation

Submitted by Donna Bristow

During January to October of 2016 our Kids' Faith Formation was guided by the spiritual curriculum, *A Joyful Path*, published by ProgressiveChristianity.org. The focus of each lesson was on each child and their active involvement in the time spent that day. Each week we had access to an "affirmation" that was repeated several times during the class and was related to the lesson. We began each class by checking in with the children – sharing their (and our) Joys & Concerns and prayer. And we closed each class with a prayer and a personal, individual blessing.

Late fall, we decided to offer multi-generational services which resulted in the children remaining in the worship service.

On Saturday, Nov 5, we held the first of hopefully more multi-generational faith formation activities. Crystal Karr planned the morning of lessons, songs, games, and activities on the Season of Advent.

The children were dressed in costume to participate in the Las Posadas parade on Dec. 11. This parade celebrated the journey to Bethlehem and culminated with a Mexican feast and piñata for the kids. David Hudson, Phil Puterbaugh, and the remaining choir members took a huge role in providing the singing for this parade.

A special thank you to Trish King, Nancy Morlock-Hollins, Bob Hollins, Donna Bristow, Jennifer Strombeck, Faye Gallegos, and Jan Morgan for planning the lessons and spending the special hour with our children. Also, a big shout out to Crystal Karr for the first multi-generational session.

Adult Education: a.k.a. Percolate (Sunday Morning @ 8:30)

Submitted by Nancy Morlock-Hollins

2016 has been a year of great growth in our understanding of justice and faith. Each Sunday morning we begin with a cooperative reading of the day's scripture taken from the bulletin and a meditation provided by one of the UCC's Daily Devotionals. This is followed by our current book study.

We began the year with a study of The Meaning of Jesus-Two Visions by Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright. This was a book of contrasts, but rather than being an acrimonious text, it was an open and respectful discussion between friends. We all found meaning in both views.

In the late spring we read Saving Jesus from the Church – How to Stop Worshipping Christ and Start Following Jesus by Robin Meyers. Robin Meyers is the first author we've read who is also a UCC pastor. His insight was a positive extension of what we have learned from our denomination, conference, our association and from our own pulpit. He encouraged us to live out our faith in service to others.

Our most intensive study took us the rest of the summer and much of the fall as we tackled Michelle Alexander's The New Jim Crow. It was a hard read – not because of the vocabulary, but because of the revelation of how our criminal justice system in the United States perpetuates a racial caste system. This book has certainly been a call to action.

We finished the year reading Traveling Mercies by Anne Lamott. It was funny and warm and a bit irreverent. She really knows how to turn a phrase. She shares her faith journey, shining light on the most ordinary of life experiences exposing meaning and hope.

As always, no matter who you are or where you are in the book, you are welcome at Percolate. The coffee is always ready!

Beyond Sunday - Adult Faith Formation

The following studies were offered during 2016:

Early in the year, a Wednesday evening group studied The Book of Mark.

In the spring, a Monday evening book study was held using the book Toxic Charity by Robert Lupton.

Theology on Tap in collaboration with High Plains Church UU began in the fall. It was held at The Whistle Pig to hopefully attract folks who may not care for the traditional church setting.

A six-week course on Engaging Buddhism was offered by Ayya Dhammadhira, a Buddhist nun.

ACCEPTANCE WHICH INCLUDES RESPECT AND WELCOMING

MEMBERSHIP

Submitted by Donna Bristow

We began the year with 67 members. Over the year, we lost nine members through transfers, withdrawals, moves, and inactive status. Throughout the year, we received six new members which added three new children; therefore, at the end of 2016, we had 64 adult and confirmed youth members on our active roll.

New member sessions were held as requested.

Member in Discernment – Crystal Karr

In the United Church of Christ, ministerial formation and authorization are overseen by Committees on Ministry in local Associations. It is important for those who are exploring God's call to partner early with their home congregation and a local Committee on Ministry. Once an individual is in covenant with a local church and a Committee on Ministry, the person is designated by the Association to be a **Member in Discernment**.

Crystal Karr graduated from Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, MO in 2010. She served two churches under the United Methodist Church appointments. After much personal discernment, Crystal wanted to explore the United Church of Christ.

Crystal Karr partnered with Vista Grande Community Church in the fall of 2015 and became a member in discernment with the Southeastern Association on June 30, 2016. She works closely with Pastor Clare and the local discernment team. Crystal has preached at Vista Grande and other UCC churches in our association. She is on Vista Grande's Faith Formation and Worship Task Force teams. We look forward to living the ministerial covenant with Crystal Karr.

Open and Affirming (ONA)

VGCC worked to live out our ONA statement in 2016 in a few ways. We supported "Inside Out Youth Services" as our mission of the month in May. We joined with other UCC churches in running an ad in "Out Front Colorado." We made a conscious effort to read our ONA statement, our values, or our purpose every Sunday during worship.

In 2016, we marched in the Pride Parade with High Plains Church Unitarian Universalists to mark the beginning of a collaboration of several joint activities.

We have taken on Inside Out Youth Services as one of our hands-on missions. In December, several folks attended the open house at Inside Out to meet the leaders and the youth. We look forward to more involvement in the new year.

Open and Affirming (ONA)

Opening and Affirming (ONA) Statement

(Approved by Vista Grande Community Church Steering Committee – September 15, 2009)

(Adopted by the congregation – Oct. 25, 2009)

Whereas, we understand that God created humanity in a variety of forms and that God called this diversity “good,”

Whereas, we observe that Jesus showed no partiality, ministering to all people including the marginalized and outcast,

Whereas, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to restore justice wherever God’s creation is broken or divided,

Whereas, we acknowledge that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons have long been excluded, rejected, and dishonored by the church,

Whereas, we believe that God’s love is for all the people,

Therefore, we, the congregation of Vista Grande Community Church United Church of Christ in Colorado Springs, CO declare ourselves to be Open and Affirming. We strive to be a congregation that includes all persons, embracing differences of sexual orientation, gender and its expression, marital status, family make-up, age, mental and physical health and ability, racial and cultural identity or background, and educational and socioeconomic status. We welcome all to share in the life, leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings, and joys of our congregation’s life in Christ. “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

THE CENTER FOR PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

In 2004, Vista Grande affiliated with The Center for Progressive Christianity.

By calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...

1. Believe that following the path and teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to:
 - Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
 - Believers and agnostics,
 - Women and men,
 - Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities,
 - Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;

5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion, and selfless love.

Version 2011

Vista Grande became a *God is Still Speaking* church in 2004.

Learn more by visiting these websites: www.progressivechristianity.org; www.ucc.org

CARING RELATIONSHIPS – FAMILY, CHILDREN, COMMUNITY, FRIENDSHIP

MISSION OF THE MONTH
Submitted by Donna Bristow

Vision for Mission

Mission/outreach is an integral part of VGCC ministries. We will pursue opportunities that are denominational and ecumenical, local and global, participatory and financial. Our mission and outreach will make a difference – empowering recipients and inspiring givers to act in the spirit of Christ.

Missions and amounts collected in 2016

January – Family Promise (\$562 plus meals)

Family Promise is a support network of churches providing homeless families with children a safe, homelike shelter where the family can stay together and share meals, as parents work with a case manager to acquire employment and affordable housing, regain independence and self-sufficiency. VGCC was a support church for Central United Methodist Church by providing the dinner meal on January 11 and June 6. We also stepped in to assist Grace and St Stephen's Church on December 15.

February – Humane Society Pikes Peak Region (\$475) plus miscellaneous toys and food)

HSPPR has been serving the community since 1949 with a mission of compassionate society where animals are cared for and valued. Our guest speaker from HSPPR was Marsha Wayman.

March – One Great Hour of Sharing (\$898)

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) – supports international programs of health, education and agricultural development, relief, and refugee assistance. This is one of the 5 for 5 special mission offerings received by the United Church of Christ and part of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM).

April - El Centro de Los Pobres (\$750.25 plus household items)

El Centro de Los Pobres (The Center for the Poor) is a non-profit organization meeting the daily survival needs of immigrant workers with low-paying jobs. The mission is to serve the immigrant poor and local indigent citizens by providing those things necessary for survival: food, clothing, and when possible, shelter. Our guest speaker was Lou Mercer.

May – Inside/Out Youth Services (\$551) plus gently used clothing and snacks

Inside/Out's mission is to educate, empower, and advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) youth. Inside/Out launched as a program for LGBTIQ youth in Colorado Springs in 1990. They are often the only safe space in the city for a queer or questioning young person. We welcomed several youth from Inside/Out and the Executive Director, Mary Malia.

June – Strengthen the Church (\$813)

This is one of the 5 for 5 missions of the United Church of Christ. This offering grows the UCC's future by funding The Stillspeaking Ministry, new and renewing churches, youth and young adult ministries, and lay and pastoral leadership formation.

July – Mercy's Gate

This mission activity was cancelled. Mercy's Gate went through some staff changes and didn't hold the annual Back to School Fair of which we had supported for over a decade.

August – Cheyenne Village (\$501)

Cheyenne Village is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization located in Colorado Springs, CO that serves adults with developmental disabilities such as Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy and Mental Retardation in El Paso, Teller and Park Counties. We welcomed Jeannie Porter as our guest speaker.

September – Neighbors in Need (NIN) (\$574)

This is one of the 5 for 5 missions of the United Church of Christ. This offering supports the UCC's ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States.

October – Literacy on the Go (LOGO) (\$423) plus children's books

It is the vision of the LOGO project to ensure that all elementary school children from low wealth families are given the opportunity to own a minimum of 20 books each year for their entire elementary school experience. We welcomed Kevin Beck as our guest speaker.

November – One Nation Walking Together (\$650) plus items for Standing Rock

ONWT Is a local non-profit organization committed to making a positive difference in the lives of Native Americans. Kathy Dunson was our guest speaker.

December –The Christmas Fund (\$832)

This is one of the 5 for 5 missions of the United Church of Christ. Proceeds are used to provide gifts to clergy and lay employees in all stages of their lives and ministries to and through the UCC.

During 2016, Vista Grande also supported the following missions:

Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) - \$2,000 to support mitigation following the Waldo Canyon Fire.

Casa de Paz (\$393) Just steps away from the immigrant detention center in Denver, Casa de Paz offers housing, meals, visits and transportation to families affected by immigrant detention. Sarah Jackson was our guest speaker.

Our Churches Wider Mission through our budget \$2,000.

A Toy Drive (In kind) – Several children's gifts were donated to a toy co-op for Christmas distribution.

Warmth tree items (in kind)

In Kind gifts estimated value of \$3,387 and Volunteer Hours totaled 175 hrs.

Our mission giving for 2016, through cash, in-kind gifts, and volunteer hours totaled approx. \$18,895

NEW! MISSION TASK FORCE

Submitted by Jamie Wise

The Vista Grande Community Church has always been a 5 for 5 church concerning missions. These missions and additional missions were emphasized on a monthly basis as in one mission would be the focus of that current month. In October of 2016 a mission task force meeting was commenced. There were approximately eight volunteers who were willing to be on this task force. We all agreed that focusing on one mission for one month was not effective enough in garnering a significant interest among the entire congregation. The missions task force agreed that the missions we were supporting were not giving the congregation the opportunity to participate in a hands-on manner and due to this, Vista Grande was not building community rapport and networking relationships.

The mission task force agreed that remaining a 5 for 5 church was vital, yet to also pick four separate missions that would directly impact our local community by giving the entire congregation weekly opportunities to participate in hands-on missions support. The task force agreed to support INSIDE/OUT, a local safe place for LGBT youth; One Nation Walking Together which supports five Native American tribes within six different states, and is based out of Colorado Springs; Family Promise, which provides low income families with shelter and food security; and Los Pobres, a service dedicated to assisting undocumented workers with health care, food, and housing.

For each of these organizations two liaisons were assigned to represent Vista Grande. Their roles and responsibilities were clearly laid out to which the liaisons agreed to execute. One of the responsibilities was to make a display table in the lobby of our church complete with pictures, a calendar of volunteer opportunities, a list of needs, and a drop off area for congregants to donate items to each of the four missions. The liaisons are responsible for informing the congregation every Sunday on the progress of our support for these missions, upcoming volunteer opportunities, and to maintain a relationship with these organizations in order to build rapport and a stronger relationship within our local community.

FELLOWSHIP REPORT

Submitted by Carolyn Gunning

This year the women of VGCC have carried on their tradition of meeting on the third Saturday of the month, alternating between breakfast one month and lunch the next. We chose some old favorite places to go to like the Omelette Parlor, Wade's Café, Cheddars, the Phantom Canyon Brewery downtown, and our very favorite, Roberta Povelite's home, in December, for our Brunch and Cookie Exchange. In September, Judy Druelinger planned another excellent Women's Retreat based on the tree of life, led by Pastor Clare and held at the Garden of the God's Trading Post Center, another favorite place.

Our Family Fellowship activities included the annual Friendship Dinner held on February 13th at Zio's Restaurant. Then on August 28th, we had a potluck picnic in conjunction with the outdoor worship service at Fox Run Park. In November, we concentrated our efforts on the Thanksgiving Potluck Dinner held after the worship service on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. In December, we were invited to come to a holiday party hosted by the High Plains Church U.U. We hope this is just the start of many joint activities with them!

Men's Fellowship consisted of a core group that met on the second Wednesday of the month at 8 a.m. at Wade's Café on North Academy. Good food, and good conversation!

All of our groups are open and welcome any newcomers to come and check them out. The bonding that occurs with these activities is priceless!

COMMUNICATION AND ADVERTISING

Submitted by Donna Bristow

Throughout 2016, we advertised our Sunday worship and other activities in The Independent (a diverse voice for Colorado Springs). We subscribed to a weekly ad and the Easter and Advent Worship Guides.

Our monthly newsletter, *Vista Views*, was available through our website and paper copy. This gave the option for our congregants to read the Vista Grande's news and support going green with less paper and printing costs.

Communication to the congregation was also made through weekly e-mail and the printed announcement sheet in the weekly bulletin.

We continued our ad, along with other UCC Open and Affirming congregations, in *Out Front Colorado* which is the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender newspaper in the Denver/Front Range area. We also had a free listing in a local business directory (gomylocal.com).

Our outdoor sign is also a way we advertise. Thanks to Nancy Morlock-Hollins for keeping this updated.

Communication is two-fold. If you have something to share or a suggestion to be made, pass it on. If you want to keep up with what's going on at Vista Grande, read the various means of communication made available to you.

Please let us know if you have any ideas to expose us in the community!! Our website is www.vgcc.org and Vista Grande is also on Facebook! Our e-mail address is vgcc.ucc@att.net

THE WIDER CHURCH

Vista Grande was well represented at Wider Church activities.

In January, the Southeastern Association installed Rev. Clare Twomey as pastor and teacher of Vista Grande UCC. The sanctuary was filled with clergy, retired and serving; friends; and many lay members from VG and the other association churches.

In May, Vista Grande hosted Module 2 of a workshop for lay leaders sponsored by the Southeastern Association.

The Rocky Mountain Conference Annual Meeting with the theme, *Blooming in the Desert*, was held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, UT on June 9-12, 2016. Our voting delegates were Dave Bristow and Donna Bristow.

On Sept. 17, several folks attended a workshop on the *Spiritual Dimensions of Aging* held at Broadmoor Community UCC.

On October 16, 2016, the Southeastern Association Annual Meeting was held at First Congregational UCC in Pueblo, CO. Our voting delegates were Kayan Cross and Dave Bristow. Pastor Clare and Donna Bristow also attended. The theme was *Be The Church*. Kayan presented a poster with pictures and story about how Vista Grande was living the statement, *Celebrate Diversity*.

In November, a few of us traveled up to Green Mountain Falls to take part in the installation service for Rev. Diane Martin.

2016 Participants on Conference and Association Teams:

Donna Bristow serves on the Church and Ministry Committee and is currently the Moderator for the Southeastern Association. Pastor Clare serves on the Church and Ministry Committee. Donna is also on the Planning Team for Congregations Alive 3 to be held in Feb. 2017.

Dave Bristow serves on the search committee for the new Associate Conference Minister and is also the delegate to Synod 2017 in Baltimore this summer.

If you would like to learn more about this rewarding ministry, serving the wider church, talk to Donna.

FACILITIES TASK FORCE

Submitted by Jan Morgan

Members: Jan Morgan, Carol Burbank, Richard Burbank, Jerry Moore, Jackie Moore, Phil Puterbaugh, Dave Bristow, Judy Gibson, Carolyn Gunning and Clare Twomey.

2016 was a busy year for this group! The sub group dealing with Real Estate issues has submitted their own report. Big thank you goes to them and their hard work. Also thank you to our Cleaning Crews who work every week to keep the building clean and attractive!!

Getting the church property cleaned up, fixed up and repaired for the future was the main goal of this group. A couple of workdays saw the lower garden emerge from an overgrown state and multiple weed sprayings were done. Phil generated an inventory of all items within the church building and storage shed. This will be helpful in knowing our storage needs in the future. Items of concern are listed below.

- Gutter system costs-to move water/ice away from building.
- Outside LED lighting- safety and security
- Remove worn carpet from outside office downstairs
- Shaving down concrete bumps by front entrance-safety
- Move sprinkler controls to east side of building
- Pave parking lot
- Grass and weed control
- Removing art piece from south hall lawn- vandalism
- Varnishing wooden doors- on going
- Compile building plans and system diagrams – for next owners
- Price internet upgrades for main building
- Buying and hanging outdoor banners

Steering Committee has approved some of the above items and more for 2017 we hope.

Thanks to all who worked hard on this Task Force and let's keep up the goal of being good stewards of our property!!

THE REAL ESTATE TASK FORCE

Submitted by Carol Burbank

The members are Dave Bristow, Judy Gibson, Phil Puterbaugh, and Carol Burbank

About one year ago, we had been approached by Shrine of Remembrance (SOR) about an early purchase option of the property. This was taken to the congregation, and a unanimous vote approved the sale. However, the sale was not completed as SOR was hoping to sell some property and use the 1041 exchange as allowed by the IRS to avoid some tax consequences. That sale did not occur, therefore, they did not have the funds to complete the purchase. They were not agreeable to the purchase price as outlined in the lease that

was signed by both parties, which clearly stated what the purchase price would be. SOR brought up other issues that were an attempt to negotiate the purchase price.

The Real Estate Task Force was set up to work with SOR and restart our communications. On Nov 1, 2016, the task force met with Mr. Costas Rombocos and Mr. Dimitri Rombocos, owners of SOR. We used this opportunity to introduce ourselves and start a fresh conversation. The meeting went well, and Costas and Dimitri were friendly and cordial. At that meeting, we provided a letter clearly stating our positions regarding the sale of the property. This gave them 3 options.

1. To purchase the property now at the lease prescribed purchase price.
2. We could continue to market the property and give them the first right of refusal as outlined in the lease.
3. If they do not purchase the property now, we would not be giving them an early purchase option, and they would have the one time to purchase in 2019. We requested a response by November 16, 2016.

On November 18, 2016, we received their reply. They would not be purchasing the property at this time, and understand that their one time option is to buy as stated in the lease by July 2019.

The steering committee met and decided to take the property off the market. This means we will stay at this location at least until 2019. The possibility of sharing the space is being looked at further. High Plains Church Universal Unitarian is looking at this option for moving their congregation to our location.

On November 25, 2016, we replied and thanked them for their response.

At our December 4, 2016 church service, this information was relayed to the congregation. If anyone had further questions on this information, we invited them to ask any of the real estate task force members.

Respectfully submitted by the Real Estate Task Force

FINANCIAL SECRETARY
Submitted by Jeannie Harrington

Year	No. of Pledges	Amount Pledged For Operating	Amt Pledges for Mission	Amount Collected	Unpledged & Plate	Mission of the Month
2016	24	\$61,330	N/A	\$60, 561	\$5,236	\$7,342
2017	21	\$59,749	\$ 7,504			

TREASURER'S REPORT
Submitted by Nancy Morlock-Hollins

Part 1 – General Fund

	2016 Budget	2016 Actual	2017 Budget (Proposed 1/20/17)
Income	\$	\$	\$
Plate	1,000.00	2,214.00	2,000.00
Pledged	61,330.00	60,561.01	59,749.00
Non-Pledged	4,000.00	3,022.00	3,500.00
South Hall Rent	30,000.00	30,000.00	30,000.00
Mission			7,504.00
Other	2,500.00	1,949.00	1,500.00
Total	\$ 98,830.00	97,746.01	104,253.00

	2016 Budget	2016 Actual	2017 Budget (Proposed 1/20/17)
Expenses	\$	\$	\$
Christian Ed	300.00	159.95	300.00
Banking/Finance	25.00	0	25.00
Membership	2,500.00	2,766.19	2,500.00
Mission	2,100.00	2,090.86	9,604.00
Office & General	1,893.00	2,267.58	2,000.00
Programs	150.00	400.00	150.00
Property	15,684.00	16,031.58	16,000.00
Worship	350.00	408.92	350.00
Payroll	77,000.00	75,968.12	77,000.00
Total	\$100,002.00	100,091.77	107,929.00
Income vs Expenses	(\$1,172.00)	(2,345.76)	(3,676.00)

Part 2 – Bank Account and United Church Funds

Account	30 December 2015	31 December 2016
Checking	\$ 23,712.01	\$ 12,043.77
United Church Funds	\$ 29,860.61	\$ 32,016.54

Part 3 – Restricted Funds – Missions & Special Projects

VGCC did budget for Restricted Funds. Contributions to specific missions and special projects were submitted directly to that fund after it was received and the balances carry over from year to year.

RESTRICTED ACCOUNT	BALANCE 1 JAN 2016	FUNDS RECEIVED 2016	FUNDS PAID 2016	BALANCE 31 DEC 2016
Youth	\$1002.69	\$58.00	\$87.95	\$972.95
Prayer Shawl	\$480.76	\$00.00	\$34.22	\$446.54
Change For Change	\$13.14	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$13.14
CO Fire	\$2,000	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$0
Choir	\$1,007.96	\$0.00	\$188.73	\$819.23
P Discretionary	\$785.15	\$20.00	\$500.11	\$305.04
V. Black	\$2,331.99	\$0.00	\$2,400.00	-\$68.01
Nursery	\$20.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$20.00
Women’s Retreat	\$82.85	\$455.00	\$463.27	\$74.58

Mission giving continues to be a strong indicator of the VGCC commitment to serving others. Mission of the Month (MOM) giving supports a variety of social causes as listed below. The starred (*) items in the following list receive non-cash donations in addition to monetary contributions.

Family Promise*	\$562.00
Humane Society*	\$475.00
One Great Hour of Sharing	\$898.00
Los Pobres*	\$750.25
Inside – Out Youth Services*	\$551.00
Strengthen the Church	\$813.00
Cheyenne Village	\$501.00
Neighbors in Need	\$574.00
Literacy on the Go*	\$423.00
One Nation Walking Together*	\$650.00
The Christmas Fund	\$832.00
Casa de Paz	\$293.00

VGCC continues to be a United Church of Christ “5 for 5” congregation. We budgeted \$2,000 for Our Churches Wider Mission in addition to the four UCC missions; One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and The Christmas Fund.

Congregational Annual Meeting
January 24, 2016

Moderator Erin Elkaim called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. Quorum was established with 31 in attendance.

Annual Report for 2015 was passed out to all. The minutes from the December 6, 2015 congregational meeting were also distributed. Motion to approve these minutes passed.

Donna Bristow presented the Annual Report and called attention to pages 11-12 which is our Missions for last year. Total donations for 2015 Missions were \$16,287.00. She reminded everyone of the green sheet where people must record their volunteer hours. Any work with missions will help us possibly get grants in the future. Also the article written by Cory Kibler on page 8 of the report was highlighted. Lori Gardner's limerick took 2nd place at SEA Annual meeting and can be found on page 14.

Pastor Clare Twomey spoke briefly about Stewardship becoming not a once a year drive but changing to a year-long focus.

Nominations for vacant Steering committee positions were received with the following people being voted into office:

Assistant Moderator: Jacque Bechthold-Blueitt (2 year term)

Financial Secretary: Jeanne Harrington (2 year term)

Clerk: Dawn Bechthold-Blueitt (2 year term)

Member at Large: Deborah Tinsley (2 year term)

Starting the year off with a full Steering Committee is a great way to move forward into our future!

Treasurer Nancy Morlock-Hollins explained that direct deposit was an option but would cost us too much (\$25) a month. Motion to approve the 2016 Budget as printed in the Annual Report was passed unanimously.

Clare met with Shrine of Remembrance and they are planning to get a building appraisal as we proceed with the plans to sell the property.

Pastor Clare closed the meeting with a prayer at 11:50 am. Go Broncos!

Submitted by

Jan Morgan, Clerk