



5460 North Union Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Mailing Address: PO Box 26030, Colorado Springs, CO 80936-6030
719-599-3057
E-mail: admin@vgcc.org Website: www.vgcc.org

Rev. Mallory Everhart

We are
*An Open and Affirming
And Just Peace
Congregation*

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

We respond
Through our Mission Partners

*Congregation at work throughout 2023...
Annual Meeting Jan. 28, 2024*

OUR VISION

"We covenant together to imagine and live into a world where God's Kin-dom vision of human and planetary flourishing comes to pass through the work of love, justice, peace, equality, and extravagant hospitality. We envision nothing less than a world restored to wholeness, wellness, joy, and gratitude for all of God's Creation." adopted April 2020

Living our core values throughout 2023

	Page
Minutes January 29, 2023	1-2
LEADING WITH CARE	
Pastor's Report	3-4
Executive Council Reports	5-8
PRC – Pastoral Relations Committee	9
CONNECTING WITH THE DIVINE	
Worship and Music	10-12
Faith Formation	12-13
FOSTERING DIVERSITY	
ONA and Just Peace Statements	13
ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY	
Hospitality	14
Mission Ministry	14-18
EMBODYING OUR VALUES	
Administrator	18
Covenantal Partners and Memorials	19
Grounds/Facilities	19-20
Financial Secretary's Report	20
Treasurer's Report and Budget	21-23

Annual Meeting Vista Grande United Church of Christ

January 29, 2023

11:23 am

Attendance: Mallory Everhart, Ethan Everhart, Dave Bristow, Dana Zimmerman, Kayan Cross, Carol Burbank, Dick Burbank, Dave Nath, Mel Druelinger, Judy Druelinger, Cindy Nath, Amanda Udis- Kessler, Lori Gardner, John Tinsley, Deborah Tinsley, Carol Wisely, Phil Puterbaugh, Bob Kinsey, Sara Weatherman, Jackie Moore, Jerry Moore, Amy Gunning, Jerima King, Linda Allen, Jud Jusell, Maggie Jusell, Terri Urban, Linda Coonley, Katherine Fatica, David Lee, Denise Lee, Donna Bristow, Jon Forshee, Erika Forshee, and Joyce Michael (non-voting guest).

Prayer: Led by Mel Druelinger

Approval of 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes- Carol Burbank makes a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mel Druelinger seconds the motion to approve the meeting minutes. Motion to approve passes unanimously on vote.

Annual Report Review as printed in the January 29, 2023 physical report

Pastor's Report by Mallory. Carol Burbank asks Pastor Mallory if the Real Estate Foundation has given a time frame for an expected response to the submission of our grant, requesting funds for our land feasibility studies totaling \$36,000. Grant timelines are expected to be announced with formal release of the Grant Requests.

Moderator's Report by Kayan Cross.

Vice Moderator's Report by David Nath.

Pastoral Relations Committee by David Bristow, and Pastor Mallory and David Bristow discuss using The Marks for the community.

Mission Report by Donna Bristow, and Linda Coonley asks if hours volunteered and mileage should be submitted for Missions projects. The answer is, Yes. Dave Bristow makes a motion to approve The Annual Report. Dave Nath seconds the motion to approve. The motion passes on vote unanimously.

Treasurer's Report by Dana Zimmerman. Bob Kinsey asks what percent of the utilities is the electric bill? Carol Burbank explains that probably the majority of the cost is electric because the building has nothing gas related. Bob asks if we might look into solar panels for the property. Dana Zimmerman concedes we have not explored the possibility prior as we were unsure about the future of the building, and recommends that the new board explore this possibility. David Nath states the 2022 budget report underscores the importance of a tenant for South Hall to generate revenue. Erika Forshee asks what fees are under the Property budget. Dana Zimmerman responds that the Property budget is property and liability insurance, utilities, building maintenance, fire system maintenance, and trash pick up. Dana Zimmerman makes a motion to approve the 2023 Budget.

Amanda Udis-Kessler seconds the motion to approve the 2023 Budget. The 2023 Budget is approved unanimously.

Voting on Executive Council positions with recognition to serving members for 2022. David Lee for Moderator. Matt Spencer for Treasurer. Recognition of outgoing members Kayan Cross, and Dana Zimmerman.

Dana Zimmerman makes a motion to approve the proposed slate of new E.C. Members. Cindy Nath seconds the motion to approve, and the motion passes on vote unanimously.

Jerima King shares year-end individual donation reports have been sent out.

Hymn- In the Midst of New Dimensions

Kayan Cross gives thanks to Amanda Udis-Kessler, and Ethan Everhart for volunteer hours, time, and efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 12:58 pm.

Notes by Erika Forshee

LEADING WITH CARE

Pastor's Report

Rev. Mallory Everhart

Sitting down to write this letter is always an opportunity to pause and reflect on everything that has transpired over the last year. Events and choices shape our life together and may seem small in the moment but, when taken together, their collective influence is seen more clearly and, my goodness, what a year it's been.

As has been our annual practice at Epiphany, we chose a star word for our year together. In 2023, our word was **HOPE**. In the ways these things work out, we didn't know what that word would come to mean for us. Last year, in hope, we passed a deficit budget, trusting that we would find a way forward together. An answer to our faithful prayer came in the form of building a relationship with HopeCOS, an organization which offers support and navigation services for our homeless neighbors and recovery fellowship for anyone seeking to live life free of addiction. We could not have asked for a more value-aligned tenant and we are looking forward to what continues to grow between us. This relationship has also added some more stability to our budget and allowed us to envision a thriving future for our congregation. More details on these factors can be found in other leadership reports.

Our work with HopeCOS has prompted us to open our doors to be one of the warming shelters throughout the cold season. We have hosted hundreds of our houseless neighbors, ensuring they are kept safe and warm while temperatures are literally threats to life and limb. Being in closer relationship with the homeless community has prompted us to lean into learning about this population and begin to build the necessary skills to accept and affirm them. We have offered Lunch and Learns on these topics, including Homelessness 101 and Trauma Informed Care. We will continue to deepen our learning and understanding through this coming year. Stay tuned for more information. If you are interested in helping with our homelessness interventions, please feel free to reach out to me or David Nath.

Through the course of the year, I have sought to balance the internal needs of the congregation with the external needs of the broader community. I am grateful for your blessing to minister to the LGBTQ+ community here in Colorado Springs, especially the survivors and victims' families of the Club Q shooting. Though the shooting itself took place in 2022, the shockwaves continue to this day and beyond. Thank you for being a church which puts its values into practice and strives to have its insides match its outsides. You all being who you are has given me the bona fides to support the queer community in ways most pastors don't have access to. Opening the doors to the drag gospel shows has been an immense joy and a partnership which will continue in 2024. If you haven't had the opportunity, make plans to come. It is truly a joyful, liberating community experience.

My spiritual director describes ordained ministry as "speaking from the heart of the community to the heart of the community." Part of the work of pastoring is deep listening to the needs of the people,

both stated and unstated. Throughout the course of this year, I have heard a deep need for opportunities for community, gathering, fellowship, and connection beyond the surface. Church leadership is implementing programming beginning in early 2024 to begin to meet this need. If you have ideas or are being drawn toward being part of a particular kind of space, please let me know so you can be met where you are. You are beloved by God and by this community and we strive to remind you of this truth at every turn.

It is important to name the triumphs and the setbacks in the year and I would be remiss if I did not mention the disruption to our worship on July 30th. While we do not know where he came from or what his full goal was, the facts are that a young man came into worship and used our sacred Joys and Concerns time to attempt to debate theology and challenge our definition of faithfulness. The situation was de-escalated and he left the premises without incident but the violation of our feeling of safety in our sanctuary has had a ripple effect. To meet this challenge head-on, we have used faith formation time to go through the Mennonite Central Committee Fear Not curriculum which has helped us think through safety and security according to our core values and theological convictions. A comprehensive safety plan will be forthcoming and we welcome your feedback and input as we roll it out.

The ways Vista Grande has been called into relationship with the broader community has been disruptive to our previous ways of being and I want to acknowledge that these shifts may be stressful and cause anxiety. We are in the process of learning and some of the transitions have been bumpy or possibly even painful. If you have feedback or would like to talk about your experience, please know that I am here to support you and hear you out. As Congregationalists, we are committed to the hard work of relationships, offering each other a full hearing and integrating feedback into any decision making. None of us have to do any of this alone and thank God for that. Your voice, experience, and safety matter even as we strive to grow our comfort zone in service of following in the path of Jesus, our brother and teacher.

I am looking forward to what 2024 has to bring us, though we may not be able to predict it at this time. Our Epiphany star word for this year is Prayer, which prompts us to lean into our spiritual lives as a guide and resource. If I know anything about living a life called by God, it is that the path is seldom linear except in retrospect and yet it has integrity to identity and core values, which are consistent. Through it all, my hope and prayer is that we continue to turn toward God and one another and find new depth of meaning in relationship.

Together,
Pastor Mallory

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS 2023

- Moderator: Dave Lee
- Asst. Moderator: David Nath
- Treasurer: Matt Spencer
- Financial Secretary: Denise Lee
- Clerk: Erika Forshee
- Member at Large: Carol Burbank
- Member at Large: Linda Allen

Executive Committee Activity

The Executive Council met seventeen times in 2023 and held one Congregational Meeting. VG started the year scheduling two EC meetings per month with one being for reports only and the other for innovation. By September, it was decided to have one longer meeting. In addition to the routine reporting of finances, pastor's report, ministry team reports, etc.; here is a brief synopsis of other business for each month:

January – Held meeting with RealEstate foundation; ongoing discussion on what to do about South Hall.

February – Focused on mask wearing conversations and reception team discussion.

March – Hosted trainings: First Aid class with NARCAN training; Discussion on several grants.

April – Received a Community Empowerment grant \$3,000; We finalized the lease terms with HopeCOS. We conducted a survey on mask wearing in the sanctuary. VG relaxed the requirement and offered special places in the sanctuary for “at risk” folks and optional masking.

May – no activity

June – Attorney edited the HopeCOS lease.

July – VG planned a BBQ fellowship and invite HopeCOS. We also started a “two-way” offering basket. Repairs needed: - HopeCOS, A/C blower repair; VG, back flows and mower.

August – HopeCOS is up and running; a porta potty is in place for their program participants. VG discussed hosting Drag Worship.

September – EC has gone back to one meeting a month; the second Sunday of the month. Discussion on HopeCOS and how we can build a relationship with them. Discussion on a Community Empowerment Retreat School and a Community Safety Program.

October – Mallory introduced a document on Liberation School; a proposal for this value-aligned new ministry.

November – Warming Shelter – discussion on “growing pains” with this new partnership. The need to growing faster than our best practices are being discussed. Mallory has arranged a pulpit supply with Beth-El Mennonite Church for Jan 21, 2024.

December – Dave Lee will sit on the Board of Advisors for HopeCOS. Contact UCFunds.

Erika Forshee, thank you for keeping our Executive Council accountable.

2023 Moderator Report

Dave Lee

Welcome to 2024! Vista Grande (aka The Little Church That Could--and Does) is boldly moving into a new year once again. This past year has been one of tremendous transformation and growing into what it means to BE AND DO church!

I view myself and Denise as fairly “new” members of Vista, and 2023 represents my first term as Moderator (our UCC word for what other churches call “council president”). I can only presume that, in the absence of any brewing Articles of Impeachment 😊 that we did ok? Thanks to all, especially my fellow council members, for tolerating the learning curve and unique Dave-isms that have come along the way through this amazing year.

Where to even begin in summarizing 2023? I’m sure I will miss some things, but let me try, and hopefully, I will spur memories in your mind as well. My overarching theme is this: we have openly expressed a willingness and desire to be working for and with those who are on the margins; this year seems to fully embody the idea of “ask and ye shall receive” (or maybe “OK, put your money where your mouth is”?).

Amazingly, it seems like with every topic I can think of, amazing helpers, resources and partners seem to have almost miraculously appeared right in concert with the area that we are stepping into. Some examples below may help explain what I mean.

First and foremost in my mind is our continuing and growing partnership with Hope COS. This started when Melissa Oskin, the Hope COS director, got in touch with Vista and we agreed we could have our building be a resource for their winter warming shelter initiative for unhoused persons, a mission she was starting up with her new organization, Hope COS.

Both Hope and Vista quickly began realizing how value-aligned we were. If our interaction had been confined simply to warming shelters, that alone would be amazing, Vista is contributing directly to DOZENS OF PEOPLE NOT FREEZING TO DEATH, thanks to the hard work of Melissa and all the Hope COS volunteers, volunteers from Vista, and our willingness to be open and be a resource. But, it did not stop there.

The relationship then grew into their interest in our vacant South Hall...they were looking for a home base from which to carry out their overall mission, and we were looking for tenants, most basically because our basic operating budget counted on some rental income.

It has been amazing to see how these connections grew and blossomed into where we are today. HopeCOS/Hope House is a valued partner that has helped Vista walk into what it means to reach out and be of service to the marginalized in our community...and Hope COS has been a dream tenant: They have transformed South Hall (now Hope House) into an amazing asset for their mission of helping and transitioning and counseling unhoused folks. I was especially pleased when Melissa and Aja gave us a Lunch-and-Learn session this year on the topic of serving the unhoused.

The theme of reaching out has continued, and the next area of note that pops into my mind as I write this is related to our Open and Affirming stance. We stand strong as Kayan, Ethan, and I have had to go out to the flagpole to replace Pride flags that get torn down, or reset our Marquee sign as it gets knocked around, or as I note the “hate mail” we get in our google reviews. The fact that we get hit by some of the same disdain as the folks that we want to stand beside is, to me, a hopeful, if unpleasant, sign that we are at least somewhat on the real “what would Jesus do?” track.

Along these lines, in relation to memorializing the Club Q tragedy and Mallory’s intensive work in this arena, most of us will recall that a major American news media organization, Good Morning America, recorded a video news segment focusing on Mallory and Vista (check it out in case you missed it... <https://youtu.be/pQ7GdP-BDhQ>).

I also hit a personal milestone, thanks to Vista being the kind of place that it is, that led to a quote that ties this piece of my report together. I’d always wanted to find an opportunity to go to some sort of Drag Show, I’d always heard what amazing and joyous experiences they were. (Spoiler: I’m a boring bald suburban dad who doesn’t get out much...).

Thanks to Mallory’s connection-ability, we got into a connection with Tiara Latrice who is an organizer of gospel and family drag brunches and shows, and Vista had the good fortune to host 2 such events at our building this year...let me say the reputation of drag shows as being amazing holds up! And Tiara said something that really stuck with me at the end of the show we hosted a short while ago...note that we were hosting a Hope House warming shelter for dozens of folks in our basement at literally the same time as we hosted an evening drag show in our sanctuary. Tiara said in relation to these two events happening together: “This is what church looks like!” All anyone can say to that is “Amen”!

Another note that goes along with the theme of Standing With The Marginalized: recall that in 2023 we got to see the fruits of being one of the few congregations to participate in Rev. Nancy Niero’s Doctoral research--we got an early look at her (spoiler alert: successful!) dissertation defense presentation. Her research was focused on dismantling white silence in the face of racial injustice, where she studied and held up prominent (or not-so-prominent) historical examples of people who had the courage to speak out, as exemplars for us to have the courage to do the same.

The next major item that comes to my mind takes me back to a major factor in our joining VGCC back in early 2020...right before the COVID pandemic exploded. I’m sure we all noted back then the great societal conflicts about things like holding church services during a respiratory virus pandemic, or wearing masks in general, and so on and so forth. I was impressed way back then how Vista didn’t even seem to flinch: ****Of course**** our church acted so as to reduce the real risk of people dying.

Fast-forward (or maybe not so fast?) to 2023, as the pandemic (sort of) began to abate, we here at Vista started the year still uniformly wearing masks at church service, and committing to continuing a hybrid-online option. We held a thoughtful, high-communication and dialog-driven process with you all to come up with our approach to worship life “post-pandemic”.

Again, I have the good feeling that comes from one of our watch-words... *integrity*. By “integrity”, I mean that we almost always seem to default to operating in alignment with our core values when things get complicated or confusing...that’s what Jesus followers do! Instead of the false “either-or” choice, we came up with a “both-and” approach to worship in the building, masking, and committed to continuing our online option, which has turned out to be very handy sometimes.

I’m very happy with the idea that we in Vista seem very committed to living out the idea of never forgetting what church is for...we are not a social club that exists solely for the purpose of having fancy and flawless worship services, we gather instead to strengthen and fortify and continually re-commit ourselves to being followers of Jesus out in the real world, where people are hurting and struggling and dealing with awfulness.

May it ever be so!

I know there are plenty of things I have omitted from this summary of 2023, but I’m hoping these few examples serve to inspire and motivate us to continue to “go and do likewise” (and even more and better) again in 2024!

Member at Large

Linda Allen

As a member at-large I find myself to be an observer on the executive council and representative of the congregation. 2023 has been a really fast-paced year that has served our community, as well as our membership. Our partnership with HopeCOS, warming shelters, and a venue for meetings and shows maintains our highly visible presence.

Should you need a person with whom you can speak frankly, have questions or issues within our midst, please know that I am available to anyone.

Member at Large

Carol Burbank

Most activities have centered around our missions. The warming shelter, that Hope COS coordinated, in February was a life saver for those unhoused. As the current tenant of the south hall, their purpose aligns with our mission statement. Additional warming shelters have occurred and will throughout the winter.

Our members have supported this church through giving of time, energy and financial assistance. I am thankful for our members that through their work have sustained this church.

The Agape Meal on the first Sunday of the month has provided the fellowship time. Having this opportunity to eat, meet, and greet members as well as visitors has been fulfilling.

The past year we have survived and thrived with all of your support and participation. As one of the members at large, and your voice on Council, please reach out if you have any ideas, questions, etc. about our church operation. Let's make 2024 as successful and look for opportunities to make our community even better.

Pastoral Relations Committee

Submitted by Dave Bristow

The team of Dave Bristow, Linda Coonley, David Nath, and Deborah Tinsley was the Pastoral Relations Committee during 2023.

The Pastoral Relations Committee is a standing committee within a local church, dedicated to fostering an open and healthy relationship between the pastor and congregation members. Operating in two key capacities, the committee acts as an advisory group to the pastor, sharing the congregation's ideas, dreams, hopes, expectations, and concerns, while also providing support for the pastor's leadership. In this supportive role, the committee interprets the pastor's roles, functions, and needs to the congregation.

Ministers are tasked with embodying and encouraging the faith of the Church and its members. The intentional cultivation of the relationship between a pastor and congregants is crucial to ensuring that the ministries of both parties complement each other, contributing to the extension of God's grace in the world.

The Pastoral Relations Committee, present within the congregation, plays a vital role in advising, assisting, and promoting the growth of this significant relationship. Its functions include serving as an advisory group to the pastor and offering support for the pastor's leadership by facilitating communication of ideas, dreams, hopes, expectations, and concerns from the congregation. Additionally, the committee supports the pastor by conveying the roles, functions, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

Operating within a framework of confidentiality, support, care, and honesty, the committee fosters healthy communication within the congregation while maintaining a close and trusted relationship with the pastor.

We met with Pastor Mallory approximately every six weeks.

Pastor Mallory sought an evaluation of her performance in the fall, prompting a review of the existing assessment process. Discussions revealed the need for revisions, and "**The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ**" was chosen as a guiding framework. Consequently, a brand-new survey was developed, scheduled to be administered to the congregation in the coming year.

CONNECTING WITH THE DIVINE

Worship and Music Submitted by Pastor Mallory

It has been an exciting year in worship, music, and the liturgical arts here at Vista Grande! The focus and goal of our worship life together throughout 2023 has been to find our place within the broader context of Christianity and lay claim to a faith which is uniquely ours. We began the year with drawing our conceptions of God and rethinking a basic component of worship, The Lord's Prayer/The Jesus Prayer. This set us on a trajectory of revisiting old stories - the ones in scripture and the ones we have been told about God – and sorting through what to challenge, what to reclaim, what to embrace, and what to lay aside. In this vein, we made a significant shift in September, moving away from the Revised Common Lectionary to the Narrative Lectionary, which guides the scriptures and themes of our worship.

Throughout the season of Lent, we explored the wilderness – a space outside of our daily life where we meet despair and, maybe counterintuitively, the deep and meaningful presence and provision of God. This exploration was paired with a new exercise for us: coming together in small groups to deepen our sense of connection and community. The practice of small groups was well-received and will be something we continue at various intervals at Vista Grande.

One of our goals with worship has been to make it as accessible as possible as we lean into the learnings COVID brought our way. We continue to offer hybrid services in our current format to foster direct engagement and communication as we struggle with, discover, celebrate, and lament in our shared life together. We have added open captioning to the in-person worship experience and implemented a song leader to support those worshipping on Zoom. As always, we are open to feedback about how to improve and draw the circle wider.

If you have joined us in person, you may have noticed the addition of a liturgical art gallery on the landing as you enter the worship space. Curated by Sara Weatherman, this is a reflective space to 'pause and ponder' the themes of the church season through diverse visual art. If you haven't gotten the chance, I highly encourage you to spend some time with these pictures!

And, of course, no report on worship could be complete without expressing incredible gratitude to our intrepid musicians, including Amanda Udis-Kessler, Erin Spencer, Mathias Spencer, Dave Nath, Cindy Nath, Jon Forshee, Bill King, Carol Burbank, David Amrie, and more. The amount of talent and commitment in our church is astounding and I am grateful for the ways all of you enrich our worship life together.

If you are interested in being part of the worship experience at Vista Grande, we will be restarting our Liturgical Arts action team – keep an eye out for an invitation to an initial meeting!

Addendum submitted by Donna (Admin)

We had several different voices and messages from our pulpit. Guest Preachers and Pulpit Supply included:

January - Mike Martin from Raw Tools – In person

February – Rev Jenny Smith from UCC Disaster – In person

April – Jennifer LaJoy – via Zoom

May - Sara Weatherman – our very own from Vista Grande - In person

June – Joshua Rumble from First Cong/COS – Pulpit swap

August – Rev Deborah Tinsley – our very own from Vista Grande - In person

September - Rev Nichola Torbett – via Zoom

September – Rev Logan Bennett – from La Foret – In person

We would be remiss if we didn't give a shout out to Ethan Everhart and Dave Bristow for their expertise in spearheading the fully hybrid service and to Deborah Tinsley for ensuring we have communion servers and the supplies to prepare the table!

Intergenerational Worship

Submitted by Sara Weatherman

On occasion an intergenerational worship service is planned designed to include people of all ages. In 2023 we made Hosanna Banners for Palm Sunday. They decorated the Sanctuary for several weeks. Of course, we had a Palm Sunday parade. On Christmas Eve in the morning we told the story of Jesus' birth from the Gospel of Luke. As the story unfolded, we created a nativity scene, complete with head dresses and sheep. Everyone was welcome to participate. Those on Zoom were invited to find a head piece at home.

A new feature is our magnetic wall at the top of the stairs. Each season there will be a variety of pictures to look at. You are invited to have conversation about them. What do you see? For example, during Advent there were nativity scenes from a wide variety of times and cultures. Feel free to take one down to study; just be sure to put it back in its place.

The children's table will continue to have an activity of some sort for any children present. We are not "staffing" the table with volunteers but parents are invited to sit there with their children.

Adult Faith Formation aka Percolate

Submitted by Linda Allen

Our focus of discussion and study remains largely on social justice or injustice past and present. During 2023 we read, *Are Prisons Obsolete* by Angela Davis; *The Politics of Jesus* by Obery Hendricks, Jr.; *Jesus and John Wayne* by Kristin Kobes Du Mez; *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Grann; and *The First Christmas* by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan.

Please view our updates in the eblast as an invitation to join us at any time. We meet on zoom at 8:30 a.m. on Sundays.

Our Library

Submitted by Linda Coonley, Church Librarian

The Library has 340 titles for checkout. Some general categories are Racial Justice, Social Justice, LGBTQ+, Bible studies, Devotionals, Politics, Christian Church, Biography and more. There is a card inside each book for readers to share thoughts. Dana Zimmerman provides printing support for labels. We do not accept fiction, items in poor condition or dated. During 2023, 18 titles were checked out.

Dedication of Our Lending Library was on Jan 15, 2023

Lunch and Learn Topics in 2023

Alphabet Soup: A Primer on LGBTQIA+ Inclusion led by Mallory

Eco theology led by Mallory

Enneagram led by Mallory

The UCC (United Church of Christ) led by Mallory

Trauma Informed Care led by Zach Davis

Homelessness 101 led by Aja King from Hope COS

Small Group Gatherings

Lenten Season - small groups gathered so folks could explore the season and engage its rich depths together.

Summer – small groups were organized. They took on a variety of activities and discussions.

Fear Not curriculum led by Mallory (referenced in the pastor's report)

Children's Faith Formation

Throughout the Sundays, we tried to offer activities that were either leader-led or self-guided. Sara Weatherman and Donna Bristow had several working meetings over lunch to try and bring some interesting activities to the table. The most successful were the multi-generational worship services and making bird feeders!

Our Youngest Ones

Our toddlers and babies now have a special place to hang out with their parent, grandparent, or special "auntie" or "uncle". Although, it is not completed, it will be shortly. Kathy Romberg has painted a beautiful mural on one of the walls. Dana will complete the project with a complimentary color on the other walls. And then, Kayan will put in a new floor. The room is outfitted with rockers, books, and some toys. Go and take a look! It's the room on the NE side of the sanctuary.

FOSTERING DIVERSITY

Vista Grande United Church of Christ is an Open and Affirming (ONA) Congregation.

(Adopted Oct 25, 2009)

"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."

Vista Grande United Church of Christ is a Just Peace Church.

(Adopted Aug. 5, 2018)

"We, the Covenantal Partners of Vista Grande Community Church United Church of Christ, declare ourselves a Just Peace Church. As a congregation and as individuals, we prayerfully strive to live out Jesus' non-violent words and actions in treating all people and the environment with dignity and respect. With humility, we seek to establish relationships with others through what may be uncomfortable conversations. While calling attention to imbalances of power and privilege, we will promote peacemaking and work to resist and dismantle religious, political, economic and social systems of oppression. We acknowledge that peace and justice work is a dynamic process, and we will need to grow continually in our empathy in order to have a positive impact in our homes, neighborhoods, communities, nation and world."

ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Hospitality

Submitted by Linda Allen

The main function for Hospitality this year was facilitating the Agape meal each month. It is a fairly smooth operation and requires only a very few persons each month. However, going forward, it will be a simple opportunity for covenantal partners to maintain our policy of radical hospitality. Hospitality also will spearhead receptions such as for weddings, funerals, and welcoming of new covenantal partners. This committee will need a chairperson and 6-8 person committee for 2024 in order to continue our practice of radical hospitality.

Addendum submitted by Donna (Admin)

Other programs:

The summer BBQ: Our goal was to invite Hope COS folk so we could meet and greet our new neighbors. However, the timing didn't work for our guests. VG enjoyed getting together.

We also tried showing Radical Hospitality to our Mission Partner leaders by inviting them to our annual Thanksgiving Dinner. We called the party and the date only worked for Family Promise's Volunteer Coordinator, Cindy Weaver and her husband. Again, Vista Grande enjoyed being together.

The Men have continued their monthly fellowship. Once a month an average of 6 men meet for breakfast. Some restaurants of their choice included: IHOP, Urban Egg, and Patty Jewett.

If you want to join in, they meet the second Wednesday at 8 a.m. Read the weekly e-blast for location.

Mission Ministry

Submitted by our Mission Coordinators

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; exemplifying The Three Great Loves: Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, and Love of Creation.

Our local missions for 2023 were Chinook Center "People's Pantry" and Sandwiches and Smiles, Family Promise, Inside-Out Youth Services, Los Pobres, and One Nation Walking Together.

All these missions are relational; several of our covenantal partners have hands-on involvement with each mission. Based, proportionally on previous giving, we allot a certain amount of our mission budget to each of these missions, and we commit to pay each one quarterly. We also support the UCC's 5 for 5. Out of our mission budget, again based on previous giving, we financially support Neighbors in Need, One Great Hour of Sharing, Our Churches Wider Mission, Strengthen the Church, and The Christmas Fund. We have met all our quarterly goals for 2023.

All our meetings are open. We generally meet after church on Zoom once a quarter.

Chinook Center, The People's Grocery

www.chinookcenter.org

Submitted by Pastor Mallory

The Chinook Center is a progressive, mission driven community space that empowers and connects people and grassroots organizations working for social, economic, and environmental justice in the Pikes Peak region. We at Vista Grande specifically support their People's Grocery initiative, which began in 2020 as a way of getting groceries to people who were food insecure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has continued and grown into a weekly food distribution which takes place from noon-2 on Sundays. Multiple people from Vista Grande are involved in packing food bags and delivering to those who are unable to come to the Center. Our donations of money and food help feed anywhere from 85-100 bags per week and an estimated 1000 people per month. Thank you so much for donating your time, money, and in-kind donations to this amazing organization!

More on Chinook Center

Submitted by Linda Coonley and Jerima King

Linda was delivering groceries to individuals up until Oct 15 when they suspended those deliveries because they were at maximum capacity with walk-ins. Jerima & Bill still deliver to the Centennial Plaza Apartments almost every Sunday. Spreading Smiles and Sandwiches (the sandwich making step). We meet the Saturday before the 3rd Sunday distribution date.

Over the past 11 months, we made from 100 to 150 sandwiches each month; an average of 6-7 people working 1.5 hours each session. We also brought toilet paper, snack foods, and clothing. The church has collected peanut butter and jam/preserves from the congregation. Each sandwich maker donated 2 loaves of bread each month. (The delivery step) Kayan picks up the food on Sunday for the distribution. Kayan would like extra help on distribution day.

One Nation Walking Together (ONWT)

www.onenationwt.org

Submitted by Judy Druelinger

Our church has supported ONWT for a number of years. This organization provides services to people living on Native American Reservations in Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. They also help Native people living in Colorado Springs. They take requested items to the various locations and help with projects that the different communities need. This year VGCC-UCC participated in One Nations food drive. During the summer we collected school supplies. This winter we collected things to fill 30 Elder Boxes. We the people of VGCC can be very proud of our support of this wonderful organization. This is a mission that does good things for our Native American neighbors.

Family Promise

www.ihn-cos.org

Submitted by Donna Bristow

Family Promise (FP) – this year has been a year of resurrection!

At the end of 2022, when non-profits were all coming out of COVID restrictions, FP discovered their budgeted income took a hit. Staffing needed adjustments and churches that usually supported pulled back. So during the year 2023, FP built up its PR and was so appreciative of the churches that continued to support (Vista Grande was one of those churches!) and others that signed up.

Family Promise hired a new Executive Director, Ralph Patrick. They located a piece of property on North Nevada Ave and it's currently being remodeled into a new day center for families experiencing homelessness. Churches rotate having families stay overnight (a week or two at a time) as temporary shelter. The day center will have showers, laundry facilities, and rooms for families to congregate.

As we cannot house families, this is different than a temporary warming shelter, we are a support congregation to Central United Methodist Church. We provide and serve meals and interact with the families. The parents are in a program that teaches them how to write a resume, apply for jobs, how to budget, how to parent, how to locate affordable housing, and much more. We had a core group who would provide meals. The families were so appreciative. We also supported their Fall Fundraiser; Chat, Meet, and Walk.

Inside-Out Youth Services (IOYS)

www.insideoutys.org

[Coordinator – OPEN](#)

Submitted by Pastor Mallory

Inside Out Youth Services builds access, equity, and power with LGBTQIA2+ young people, through leadership, advocacy, community-building, education, and peer support. This year, we at Vista Grande were asked to specifically support two initiatives through our in-kind donations: art supplies and a gender-affirming makeup drive. Inside Out's vision is "Wholeness. Inside and out." Our donations helped LGBTQ+ youth gain access to artistic expression and facilitated the ability to explore gender expression – both are incredible gifts to these young people and contribute to the safe and brave space the IOYS staff holds for them. Big things are happening at IOYS – they have launched the Pikes Peak Safe at School initiative which advocates for LGBTQ+ inclusive best practices and suicide prevention in local school districts. As of the end of 2023, IOYS announced that they are moving to a new space located just west of downtown on Colorado which will give them room to grow and expand their programming supporting youth ages 13-24.

2023 Los Pobres

Submitted by Jud Jusell

VGCC continues to be a supporter of Los Pobres Center near Pueblo Colorado, which meets the daily survival needs of migrant workers with low-paying jobs—the majority of whom live below the poverty level and cannot access assistance through the channels open to American citizens.

For 2023, Jud Jusell served as the liaison between VGCC and visited Los Pobres in March, August, and December. In March, he and his wife, Maggie, took down 32 \$25 Walmart gift cards, and many material contributions to include clothes, plates, bowls, cups, and empty medicine containers. They also introduced Pastor Mallory to Sister Nancy Crafton, who through her indomitable spirit, directs her all-volunteer team.

Due to the heavy rains causing the fields to be flooded this summer in southern Colorado, the Center had run out of men's socks and shoes. VGCC had a successful drive collecting men's socks, men's work shoes, t-shirts, long-sleeved shirts, school supplies and various other items. Jud and Maggie drove the items down to Los Pobres at the end of August.

In December, VGCC donated 27 \$25 Walmart gift cards and some material contributions to include jackets, some household items, and some more empty medicine containers. Jud was able to introduce VGCC congregant, Zach Davis, to Sister Nancy, who gave him a tour of the Los Pobres facility.

In total this year, VGCC donated carloads of much-needed material contributions as well as \$1,475 of Walmart gift cards. Our contributions made a difference in Los Pobres' ongoing efforts to serve 2,000 people throughout four counties. Sister Nancy is extremely grateful for VGCC's faithful material and financial support of, and prayers for, immigrant families here in Colorado.

The UCC 5 for 5 Missions

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) – supports international programs of health, education and agricultural development, relief, and refugee assistance.

Strengthen the Church - 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.

Neighbor in Need (NIN) - This offering supports the UCC's ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States.

The Christmas Fund - Proceeds are used to provide gifts to clergy and lay employees in all stages of their lives and ministries to and through the UCC.

Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM) - This was paid through our General Budget.

Unlike mission-directed giving, OCWM Basic Support allows the Conference to retain a supportive staff that provides necessary guidance and resources to support the health and vitality of our churches; 78% remains in the RMC and 22% supports the National Office.

Funding missions:

Many folks pledged to our missions in 2023 and others gave to special appeals. Our group mission results:

Financial Giving Directly to Mission Programs - \$21,132.00 (These numbers don't always match the treasurer's numbers because we include donations that are directly given to the agency.)

In Kind Giving to Mission Programs - \$6,733

Mileage traveled (764 miles) to support Missions calculated – \$204

Volunteer Hours (467 hours) spent to support Mission Activity (@ \$24/hr) – \$11,208

Total for Mission Giving: \$39,277

In-Kind Non-Mission Donations

We are very grateful to folks who gave “in kind” items and volunteer hours to the many ministries at Vista Grande; program, property, worship, faith formation, and office. These were estimated at \$3,273 in items and 357 hours which translates to \$8,568. We could accomplish a lot more because of these gifts.

Total for In Kind Giving: \$11,841

EMBODYING OUR VALUES

Admin Report

Submitted by Donna Bristow

During 2023, our staffing capacities have been kept to a minimum. Amanda Udis-Kessler and Erin Spencer offered their musical talents in order to keep live music during our worship services. We had several choral pieces too.

We continued having a musical song leader. That helped the congregation learn new songs and encouraged more singing. We are blessed!

W-4s for our pastor and administrative assistant are kept current. Meeting minutes, policies, and other pertinent documents are kept on file.

Our property insurance is maintained through the United Church of Christ Insurance Board. In working toward best practices in finance and safety measures, we performed background checks on our financial folks through Praesidium, Inc. which is contracted through our Insurance Board.

Covenantal Partners (CP) and Memorials

Vista Grande UCC began the year with 70 recorded covenantal partners/members and affiliates. Pastor Mallory held 3 new CP sessions. Overall, we received nine new persons as covenantal partners. At the end of 2023, unfortunately, eight persons were moved to inactive status, and one withdrew. Vista Grande ended the year with 70 covenantal partners. Average Hybrid worship attendance for 2023 was 44.

Our 2023 voting delegates included:

1. Kayan Cross and Amanda Udis-Kessler at the Rocky Mountain Conference Annual Celebration, June 15-17 in Grand Junction, CO; other attendees were Dave and Donna Bristow and Pastor Mallory.
2. Cindy Nath and Dave Bristow at the Southeastern Association Fall Meeting, October 21 in Parker CO; other attendees Donna Bristow and Sara Weatherman.

This year we were notified of three former member deaths:

Rev. Wil Green; March 22, 1930 – January 16, 2023;

Jim Diers; May 12, 1942 – July 2, 2023;

Richard King; October 11, 1945 – July 26, 2023.

These folks were instrumental members during their active time at Vista Grande.

The WIDER CHURCH

We value our connection with the Wider Church ...

Pastor Mallory sits on the Board of Directors as the Southeastern Association Representative and is on the Formation and Authorization Committee for the Committee on Ministry.

Dave Bristow is a Volunteer for the Rocky Mountain Conference helping with communications and the clergy database.

Donna Bristow is the Registrar for the Formation and Authorization Committee and for the Southeastern Association.

Sara Weatherman has just volunteered to be the Association Moderator.

If you'd like to connect with the Wider Church, please contact Mallory, Dave B, Donna, or Sara.

Donna is on the Congregational Care Committee (CCC) for Family Promise.

Grounds and Facilities

As we still haven't found a leader for our facilities, we chip in where we can.

Our Little Building

The building in the lower parking lot was the original church building from 1978 – 1986 and was known as South Hall. Over the years it has been used by many other ministries and now has been leased by HOPE COS and is called Hope House! You have probably already read some of the reports about leasing to a value aligned tenant. Rather than try and share all that Hope COS does, here is their website. <https://hopecos.org/>

Our Sanctuary Building

This building has been known as our main building for quite some time. We have held worship, parties, programs, fundraisers, mission activities, youth group, faith formation, rehearsals, and much more since 1986. As with your homes, it needs to be kept up. That has always been a challenge and becoming more so. Thank you to Jackie and Jerry Moore who have kept a roster of church building cleaners. Volunteers always needed.

This year, a group of folks have been clearing out some of the areas that seem to accumulate extra “stuff.” Our mission partners have benefitted as it’s still useful, just not here.

Grounds and Upkeep

Thanks to Denise Lee who organized several grounds upkeep Saturdays over the Spring, Summer, and Fall. And, to the folks who would come and help. We would average around 10 folks who would come and give an hour or more each time. Many hands make light work!

And yes, some folks would come by on their own and weed or pick up trash (a never-ending job). That helped too. THANK YOU!

Insurance

We have our liability and property insurance through the United Church of Christ Insurance Board. As with all insurance companies, the cost has escalated. We try to follow Best Practices to keep tabs on utility costs. We need everyone to help with that too. If you see a light on in a vacant room, turn it off.

2023 Financial Secretary Report

Submitted by Denise Lee

The pledged amount for Operating in 2023 was well supported by the congregation. The pledged Mission fell short by 19%. Non-Pledged contributions collected in 2023 were \$3,048.88 less than 2022. Non-pledged Mission contributions compared to 2022 were ahead by \$1,010, and plate was up by \$638.58 (We started the two-way offering plate at the end of May). For 2024, pledging is down for both Operating and Mission.

Year	Total Pedges	Pledged		Pledged Collected		Non Pledged Collected		
		Operating	Mission	Operating	Mission	Operating	Mission	Plate
2023	26 ¹	70,311.60	19,220.00	75,729.80	1,5595.00	6,369.12	1,250.00	824.58
2024	21 ²	67,001.60	18,360.00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: 1. Final at end of the year.

2. Tally at beginning of year.

Treasurer Report
Submitted by Matt Spencer

There are many exciting things happening this year, and although my other life commitments are too great for me to continue serving as the Vista Grande treasurer, I feel blessed that I got to participate in the discussions about our church's identity and how to best express that identity in the work that we do, and the contributions we make.

The Executive Council wants to sincerely thank everyone who was so faithful with your pledges and everyone who was generous beyond their pledges, as we ended the year with income in the General Fund exceeding the pledged amount! Another sincere thanks to all who have submitted pledges for this year, and if you have not yet pledged it is not too late for that to make a difference!

This year, a couple of large building maintenance expenses pushed us from being close to breaking even on our budget to instead chewing through the buffer fund in our bank account. The council has decided to pull funds from Vista Grande's investment account to balance this. We are glad that the account is there to help in circumstances like this, but we are hopeful that your generous contributions in 2024 will help build back up the monetary buffer available for unexpected expenses that we run into in the future.

Financially, it is wonderful news that we now have a steady renter for South Hall, and the council is most delighted that our partners align closely in vision and ideals as well. The rent provides a much-needed source of income which is predictable and steady, but it is not the end-all for our finances as it only covers about a quarter of the church's expected expenses.

The budget presented in this report represents very little more than the barest requirements that will keep Vista Grande operating in 2024. Only confirmed pledges were recorded for that income line item, while the rest of the proposed budget (income and expenses) are projections based on the history of each category and any additional knowledge the council has to account for expected divergences.

Part 1 - General Fund			
Income	2023 Budget	2023 Actual	2024 Proposed
Pledges	\$ 66,450.00	\$ 75,729.80	\$ 67,001.60
Plate Offerings	\$ 500.00	\$ 824.58	\$ 400.00
Non-Pledged Checks	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 6,369.12	\$ 6,500.00
South Hall Rental	\$ -	\$ 10,700.00	\$ 24,000.00
King Soopers Bonus	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 862.55	\$ 950.00
Misc	\$ -	\$ 26.00	\$ -
Total	\$ 77,950.00	\$ 94,512.05	\$ 98,851.60
Expenses	2023 Budget	2023 Actual	2024 Proposed
Faith Formation	\$ 100.00	\$ 9.49	\$ 100.00
Finance	\$ 850.00	\$ 438.81	\$ 660.00
Membership	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 1,415.07	\$ 1,411.02
Office & General	\$ 2,530.00	\$ 2,226.75	\$ 2,704.25
Programs	\$ 800.00	\$ 153.07	\$ 300.00
Property	\$ 32,280.00	\$ 33,543.57	\$ 32,094.16
Worship	\$ 300.00	\$ 268.56	\$ 300.00
Payroll	\$ 77,899.16	\$ 74,004.82	\$ 77,191.56
Total	\$ 116,009.16	\$ 112,060.14	\$ 114,760.98
Income - Expenses	\$ (38,059.16)	\$ (17,548.09)	\$ (15,909.38)

Part 2 - Restricted Funds				
Account	Balance 12/31/22	Income	Expenses	Balance 12/31/23
Missions	\$ 3,191.79	\$ 16,995.00	\$ 18,046.79	\$ 2,140.00
Pastor Discretionary	\$ 2,229.02	\$ 960.00	\$ 156.00	\$ 3,033.02
Covid 19 Help	\$ 1,273.69	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,273.69
Youth	\$ 918.74	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 918.74
Choir	\$ 892.94	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 892.94
Women's Retreat	\$ 198.21	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 198.21
Covental Partner Care	\$ 423.18	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 423.18
Zoom Equipment	\$ 578.12	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 578.12
General Revolving	\$ 200.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 200.00
Flags	\$ 75.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 75.00
Emergency Relief	\$ -	\$ 2,630.00	\$ 2,630.00	\$ -
HopeCOS Deposit	\$ -	\$ 2,000.00	\$ -	\$ 2,000.00
In the Mud Grant	\$ 333.76	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 333.76
Memorial Gifts	\$ 6,058.03	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6,058.03
Community Empowerment	\$ 200.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 4,280.00	\$ 920.00
RMC Grant	\$ -	\$ 20,000.00	\$ -	\$ 20,000.00
Total	\$ 16,572.48	\$ 47,585.00	\$ 25,112.79	\$ 39,044.69

Mission Detail	Paid in 2023
Family Promise	\$ 1,450.00
Inside Out Youth Services	\$ 1,300.00
Los Pobres	\$ 1,300.00
One Nation Walking Together	\$ 1,300.00
Smiles & Sandwiches	\$ -
Chinook Center	\$ 1,000.00
Chinook Center (Extra Misc)	\$ 500.00
Love Offering	\$ 750.00
Emergency Relief	\$ 2,000.00
5/5 Our Church's Wider Mission	\$ 3,000.00
5/5 One Great Hour of Sharing	\$ 1,300.00
5/5 Strengthen the Church	\$ 1,000.00
5/5 Neighbors in Need	\$ 900.00
5/5 The Christmas Fund	\$ 1,000.00
Mission Speakers	\$ -
Benefit Programs	\$ 425.00
Other Misc. Missions	\$ 821.79
Total	\$ 18,046.79
2024 Mission Pledges	\$ 18,360.00

Part 3 - Bank Account		
Date	12/31/2022	12/31/2023
Balance	\$ 25,449.06	\$ 31,323.87

Financial Giving to Missions 2023

Total \$21,132

