

Foothills Unitarian
LOVE UNITES US ALL

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

970-493-5906 | hello@foothillsuu.org | foothillsuu.org
1815 Yorktown Ave, Fort Collins, CO 80526

Joyful Resilience

In her video message supporting our new building completion, UUA President Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt acknowledged that many people today are doubting the continued presence of progressive religion. Many UU congregations find themselves in a state of serious decline. This is not because the world does not need progressive faith but rather a reflection of difficult post-pandemic realities. Finances are tight. Engagement is low. Mission is muddled.

We are incredibly grateful and proud to tell you that Foothills Unitarian in 2023 (at 125 years of progressive religion in Northern Colorado!) has a completely different story to tell. Despite the fact that so many of our financial and energetic resources have been diverted since July 2022 to our much-needed yet repeatedly extended building expansion, 2023 has been for our community a year of strengthening mission, growing engagement, and increasing generosity. 2023 has been a year of joyful resilience.

Here are just a few examples...

Caring Team! In 2023, more than 300 people of all ages connected with our caring team - in one-on-one conversations, in small groups for grief and caregiver support, in caring kits and meals, and in care at a loved one's end-of-life, especially from our amazing Memorial Team.

Ministry for Kids, Youth, and Families! Attend a 10:30 service, and you'll quickly see how our programs for kids are growing. We are regularly seeing more than 50 children on Sundays, and in a given month more than 100 families are joining our groups. Buckhorn camp over Labor Day was a huge success, culminating in a beautiful worship service for all ages in the outdoor chapel, and kids' summer camps and OWL sexuality education classes were in full swing this year. We are also especially proud of our growing outreach to parents of gender-creative and trans kids through True You, which meets monthly.

Radical Welcome and Safety Teams! A key part of preparing for our new sanctuary and recovering post-pandemic came in the formation of these two overlapping teams, which together create a welcoming and safe environment on Sundays and beyond. These groups are learning about micro-aggressions, de-escalation, emergency response, and best practices for welcoming and integrating newcomers. These teams both serve the congregation as we are, as well as help us to prepare for our future. With their support, we welcomed over 40 new members this year, supported 76 people in attending Base Camp, and welcomed more than 15 new folks every Sunday.

Rainbow Villages! This pilot program - in partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and a national non-profit - supports and accompanies trans individuals and their families as they relocate from communities where they are unable to get necessary health care and other services or reliably expect safety due to anti-trans legislation and dangerous cultural norms. So far, we have helped two single individuals, one couple, and one family of five settle in Northern Colorado. We have also supported four other Colorado faith communities to establish their own similar programs.

Choir! As Benjamin moved into his second year, he and we rejoiced to see the choir continue to grow and flourish, regularly seeing more than 40 people on Wednesday nights for rehearsal, with an increasing diversity of age. Alongside our adult choir, the madrigals and our children's choir are continuing to rebuild post-pandemic, and we were also grateful to finally launch our Comfort Choir this year. It has long been our dream to offer this small group of singers who gather around members' hospital bedsides and homes as an additional source of comfort and care.

Small Groups! Not only did our Sisterhood celebrate their 10 year anniversary, their ministry together is stronger than ever, with more than 90 women gathering monthly in small groups and dozens of women gathering for a luncheon every other month for reflection, friendship, and creativity - as we saw on full display at one group's amazing offering exploring Foothills history this fall. We also saw the return of the Brotherhood this year after a number of years on hiatus. Beyond Sisterhood and Brotherhood, from Journey Groups to Wellspring to My Grandmother's Hands, from SpiritLift to Resilience Groups to Senior Potlucks, **more than 250 of us meet in small groups every month for deeper connection, mutual support, and spiritual growth.**

There is so much more even beyond this list - Reproductive Justice, Climate Justice, Immigration Justice, Food Bank, Faith Family Hospitality, Habitat for Humanity, Spanish conversational groups, book groups....and then, of course, there are Sundays! While in 2023 we were not quite back to the levels of attendance we saw pre-pandemic, the trends are strong, and throughout the year, we saw breakthrough moments showing our resilience. With the opening of our new sanctuary, it seems likely these moments will turn into trends in the coming year.

We can't know exactly what 2024 will bring - what resources it will require of us. We don't yet know what will shift in our world and then how we will be called to respond. The good news is we do know one important thing about our future. Your willingness to show up with love and courage, creativity and compassion, humor and playfulness will make the difference. Which means you just need to be yourselves, and keep showing up with that same joyful resilience that brought us this far.

Thank you for a wonderful, resilient, joyful 2023, and thank you for being you. It's going to be a great year!



Revs. Gretchen, Sean, and Elaine on Christmas Eve

Welcome to Our Brand-New Sanctuary!

"We know that every person who will come through those doors every Sunday for years beyond our own lifetimes will arrive like each of us here today *'hungry to be gathered in, nothing of them found foreign, or strange, and nothing of their lives left behind, or carried in silence, or in shame.'*

To find here, sanctuary and refuge. To be sanctuary for one another.
In these days - we know - it is no time for a casual faith or for chill gatherings.

Without this understanding, this commitment, and this clarity of purpose - we would never be here, in this moment, in this building, in this gathering."

- Rev. Gretchen Haley, December 3, 2023 (italicized text quoted from Jan Richardson)

On Sunday, December 3, we held our first Sunday in our long-awaited new sanctuary. Over 500 people joined us for this joyous occasion in the life of our church. The new sanctuary, for which we broke ground in May 2022, represents over 10 years of dreaming, visioning, and planning, 19 months of active construction, and the tremendous generosity of our beloved congregation.

The expanded space totals 13,204 square feet. features a 400-person sanctuary and performance hall with mountain views, an enlarged entrance/coffee foyer, additional meeting spaces, more than double the space on our lower level.



Revs. Gretchen, Sean, and Elaine welcome people to our first service in the new sanctuary!



A full sanctuary at the 10:30 a.m. service

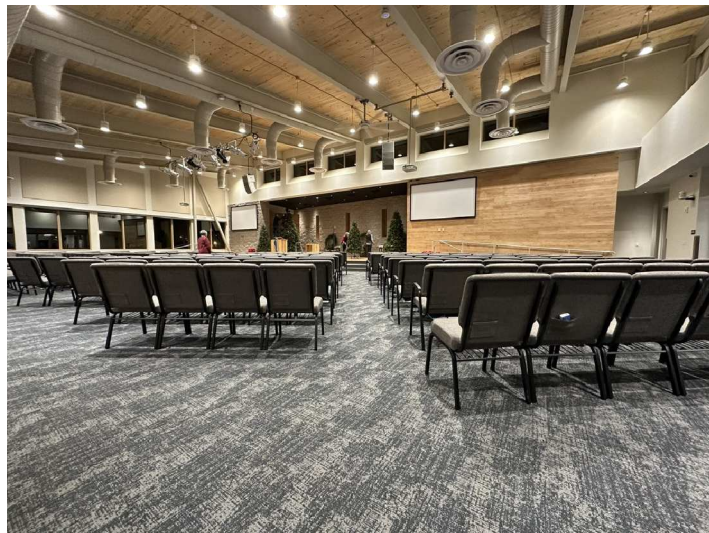
Our building reflects our values and commitment to sustainability:

- Net-zero-ready, meaning we expect to generate enough energy to cover our usage
- Energy-efficient construction
- All-electric customized HVAC System
- Highly efficient insulation in walls and roof
- LED Lighting
- Low-emissions glass windows
- Solar Panels will be installed this Spring... look for your chance to sponsor-a-panel in the coming weeks!

Welcome to Our Brand-New Sanctuary!

The completion of this project positions us to be an even greater resource to our wider Northern Colorado community. We look forward to how our expanded space will increase our capacity to show up for and resource our community partners like Family Housing Network, ISAAC, Homeward Alliance, and the Food Bank for Larimer County.

The additional meeting rooms and social areas are now ready for use, serving as a hub for local community initiatives. These spaces reflect our commitment to being a resource not only for our congregation but for the broader community.



Our new sanctuary seats 300-400 people, depending on chair arrangement.



Kids process out of the sanctuary to join their small groups.



Multigenerational inaugural chalice lighting in the new sanctuary

This expansion is more than just a physical space; it is a symbol of our progressive mission of unleashing courageous love in Northern Colorado and beyond. In the wake of the challenges of the past few years, our building stands as a beacon of inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement. It is a true symbol of how liberal religion is so needed in our world today - a force for organizing as a community of care and as an invitation to a purpose greater than oneself. We extend our deepest gratitude to all who contributed to making this vision a reality. Together, we have built not just a building but a home for our community to gather, celebrate, mourn, and grow. We look forward to the positive impact this expanded space will have on the lives of our congregation and the broader community for years to come.



Worship



2023 was the 125th anniversary of our congregation and the year we finally moved into our long-awaited new sanctuary. This year, our congregation demonstrated incredible joyful resilience as the construction came with unexpected twists and turns and required us all to sometimes pivot and get creative. Resilience, as in the ability to persist through challenges and show strength. And joyful resilience because the way that we approached that persistence was not by powering through but through caring for each other with love, laughter, and joy!

Incredibly, we saw a 25% average increase in Sunday attendance over 2022, even with the church being a construction zone for the majority of the year. Our first holiday season in the new building was record-setting, with 975 people joining us for a Christmas Eve service and 250 people joining us for our Winter Solstice Vespers Service.



1,620

people attended Sunday services.



15

average newcomers every Sunday.



115

participants in Journey Groups, small groups that explore themes more deeply through semi-structured conversation.



1,375

seats filled over the winter holidays, which included a Winter Solstice Service, three Christmas Eve services, and A Drag Christmas Spectacular!



6

memorial services.



8

Vespers services, including special services for the Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice, and Winter Solstice.



31,436

YouTube views.



17,600

podcast downloads.

2023 Worship Series



GenderFluent

FEBRUARY 2023 SERIES



TERMS OF SERVICE

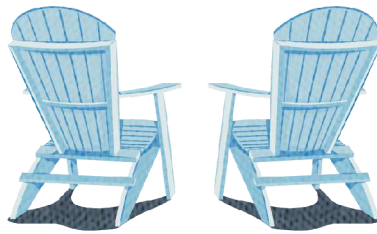
the fine print of community

MARCH 2023 SERIES

Time Well Wasted



Sit by Me



June 2023 Series



September 2023 Mini-Series

FIRST TIMES

October Series



Active Hope

April 2023 Series



July/August Series

God *a concept*

a universe of meaning

Prophets & Bystanders

Confronting Christian Nationalism and Fascism with Liberal Faith

November 2023 Series



Gather in...

*Joy Wishes
Guests Ritual*

December 2023 Series





Family Ministry

305 children and youth participated in our programs in 2023, including 138 youth who participated in our Sunday morning Children and Youth Groups!



86 kids attended our summer Chalice Camp.



We held a bridging ceremony for six of our graduating seniors to honor and support this time of transition in their lives.



We joyfully blessed nine babies with a ritual and a promise to support them as their community for their whole lives.



150 adults and kids attended Buckhorn Family Retreat.

Welcoming Newcomers

In 2023, we formed our Radical Welcome and Safe Space Teams. These teams, crucial in preparing for our new sanctuary and navigating post-pandemic challenges, built on some fun and meaningful experiences from our Summer of Belonging to create a welcoming and secure environment on Sundays and beyond. In 2023, we also started offering Foothills 101, a twice-monthly drop-in class where newcomers can learn more about Foothills and ask questions.

➔ 40

new members joined in 2023.

➔ 125

children and youth joined us for a family ministry group or program for the first time in 2023.

➔ 76

people participated in BaseCamp: The First Step to Membership to learn more about deepening involvement at Foothills Unitarian and with Unitarian Universalism.

➔ 25 | 14

Members of the Radical Welcome Team
| Members of the Safe Space Team

➔ 15

newcomers every Sunday (average).

➔ 40

newcomers joined a justice or service team!

➔ 162

new adults joined a small group.

"The very thought of Basecamp made me so uneasy that I postponed it. While various friends had told me that Foothills was the place to be part of the projects in Climate Justice that I wanted, I was concerned that I was going to have to quit UU after the system of theological beliefs Basecamp would impose.

So when I finally got myself to Basecamp one Saturday, it was my delight to discover that UU was about covenanting together to practice courageous love - in other words, a commitment to deeds, not creeds.

Since then, I attend Sunday morning services regularly for sermons that encourage active love and kindness. I value bi-weekly meetings with a caring sisterhood. I appreciate becoming acquainted with the work and members of the Climate Justice group. And I have signed up to join the next Journey Groups.

I'm glad I went to Basecamp."

-Jean Lehman, New Foothills Member
Attended Basecamp in September 2023



New Member Ceremony in October 2023

Music

2023 saw a tremendous growth in Music at Foothills. From the creation of the Comfort Choir, which provides the comfort of music to those experiencing a challenging time, to leading the larger Fort Collins community in song at the MLK March, music was woven into all aspects of church life, from caring to justice to worship.

➔ 71

people participated in adult choir.

➔ 19

kids participated in at least one children's choir (Spring and Holiday).

➔ 41

people participated in the 2023 Foothills Fall Choir Retreat.

➔ 37 | 21

singers participated in the MLK pop-up choir | singers participated in the Earth Day Pick-Up Choir



The Foothills Madrigal Singers at the Garden of Lights.



The Choir performs on Christmas Eve.



All-Music Sunday. Left to right on stage: Jack Morgan, Juley Sobson, Gretchen Steidley, Benjamin Hanson, Cory Carroll.



Members of the Spring Children's Choir perform at All-Music Sunday.

A Look Back Through Photos



MLK March
January 2023



Topping Off Party
February 2023



Gender Fluent Series Bookmarks
March 2023



Baby Blessing
April 2023



Time Well Wasted Sunday
May 2023



Summer Solstice Vespers
June 2023



Chalice Camp
July 2023



Water Ceremony
August 2023



Buckhorn Family Retreat
September 2023



UUUs Just Wanna Have Fun, 80s themed Annual Auction
October 2023



Celebrate Anyway! Sunday
October 2023



The Slightly Senior Sisterhood hosts the Chalice Awards, a celebration of Foothills Unitarian History
November 2023



Christmas Eve 2023
975 people joined us in person and online across three services on Christmas Eve.

Social, Support & Spiritual Small Groups

Over 250 people gather monthly in small groups, fostering connection, support, and spiritual growth.

In 2023, **Wellspring and Journey Groups** continued to be vital sources of spiritual deepening and faith formation.

113 people participated in Journey Groups, small groups of 10 that meet seasonally for six sessions focused on the following themes in 2023:

- Winter 2023: Our Histories
- Spring 2023: Active Hope
- Fall 2023: Explored our worship themes more deeply, including the experience of being a novice, how to respond to the rising tide of right-wing fascism, and the gifts of the Winter Solstice

27 people are participating in four Wellspring groups that launched in 2023. Wellspring is a 10-month program of distinctly Unitarian Universalist spiritual development. Three of the groups are utilizing the **Wellspring Sacred Arts** curriculum, which offers spiritual deepening through the arts. The connection between spirituality and creativity is explored through an examination of various art forms, participants' own acts of art-making, and reflections on what art has to teach them about theology and faith. One of the groups is utilizing the Wellspring Sources curriculum, which is the prerequisite for all other UU Wellspring courses. Sources offers participants an opportunity for reflection around two key areas: Unitarian Universalist history and theology and the "big questions" that are central to our Unitarian Universalist faith.



Annual Brunch for Wellspring Participants

Additionally, groups like **Courageous Families**, **Social Senior Potluck**, and the **Joseph Preistly Salon** continued to be sources of connection and conversation, while our **Yoga** and **Tai Chih Chi** groups provided spaces for spiritual practice.

Our Earth Based Path Group, which meets regularly to foster awareness of our connection with Mother Earth and her changes through the wheel of the year, hosted a Winter Solstice Service attended by 250 people. It was a beautiful ritual aimed at blessing the darkness and celebrating the return of the light.



Winter Solstice Vespers Service

Social, Support & Spiritual Small Groups

With over 80 small groups and teams at Foothills Unitarian, 2023 brought milestones and new additions:

Slightly Senior Sisterhood's 10-Year Milestone: The Sisterhood reached a remarkable milestone, celebrating their 10-year anniversary. With more than 90 women gathering monthly in small groups and dozens of women gathering for a luncheon every other month, Sisterhood remains a vital and enduring force within our community.

Brotherhood's Return: After a hiatus, Brotherhood (Foothills Unitarian's Men's group) made a triumphant return in 2023, with 45 men participating in 2023, marking a renewed sense of camaraderie and connection among the men in our community.



The Brotherhood unloads chairs for the new sanctuary!

Millennial(ish) Group:

The Millennial(ish) group, now 45-strong, gathers monthly for fun outings in the community!

Caregivers of Loved Ones with Dementia: Formed in 2023, the Caregivers group provides a confidential space for shared experiences and support.

Climate Resilience Group: Inspired by Joanna Macy's work, the Climate Resilience Group focuses on grounding in gratitude, honoring pain for the world, and fostering active hope.



Janine Davis Speaks at the Sisterhood 10-year Anniversary Luncheon

Unpacking Religious Baggage: Offered for the first time in 2023, "Unpacking Religious Baggage" invites participants to lighten the load of painful religious experiences and make room for new stories to unfold. This offering, addressing hurt, betrayal, and the quest for healing, will be an annual opportunity for our community.

My Grandmother's Hands anti-racism somatic practice groups work to identify and process the racism ingrained in all our bodies. Guided by the wisdom of Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands*, participants engage in a unique and embodied approach to anti-racism, fostering both personal and collective growth.



My Grandmother's Hands 2023 Retreat

Caring Ministry

In the heart of Foothills Unitarian, the caring community unfolded with remarkable warmth and abundance this year, a testament to the power of our covenant, in which we promise to help one another.

We provided
over 400 acts
of care.

Our Meal Train
Team provided
141 meals.

Over 200 people
received support
through our
Caring Network.

Our Caring Kit
Team delivered
27 caring kits.

"We are most appreciative of the Caring Team for the wonderful support during Jim's and my recent 'perfect storm' of medical events. The meals brought by Kay and Brianna eased a lot of stress. The cards from Kristina, Cheryl, Edith, Linda, and June contained such caring and encouraging messages. And the Caring Kit delivered by a warm and smiling Sarah was a big boost to morale."

- Beverly Lloyd, Church Member

Three new groups emerged as part of our Caring Network, bringing comfort, solace, and support to community members.

The **Textile Crafters for Caring Kits** group spun a new thread of compassion. Coming together regularly, they meticulously crafted comfort shawls to include in caring kits. These kits, filled with items of ritual and support, are delivered to individuals navigating challenging times, offering a tangible embrace from our community.

Recognizing the unique journey of caregivers, a new group for **Caregivers of Loved Ones with Dementia** formed. Through shared experiences, this group became a sanctuary, providing support and understanding to those walking a path that can be both rewarding and challenging.

A harmonious addition emerged with the birth of the **Comfort Choir**. The comfort choir visits and sings to people experiencing challenging times, including those nearing the end of life. Music becomes a source of solace, transcending words to bring comfort and heartfelt community.

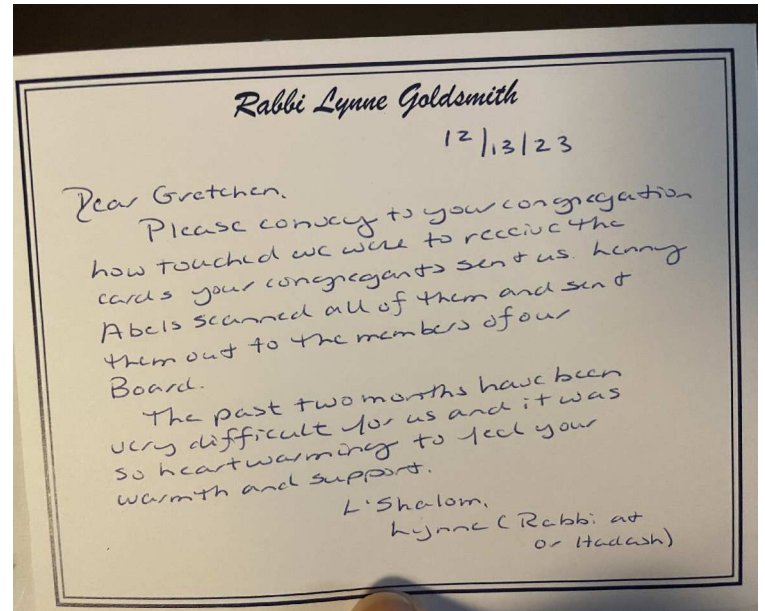
Foothills Unitarian Choir, other congregants, and friends sing by candlelight to honor the life and provide solace to the family of beloved Foothills Member Brian Woodruff who died on December 9, 2023.



Caring Ministry

Our caring spirit extended beyond our immediate community. In a gesture of solidarity and love, we collectively wrote letters of support to Wellington Middle School Staff facing a challenging anti-LGBT campaign. Additionally, we sent notes of love and encouragement to the Jewish and Muslim communities after the October 7 attack.

We also reached across the miles to support the First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City, standing united against anti-trans legislation in their state and nationwide and partnered with Side with Love to send a powerful message of love and support to trans and nonbinary people and families with trans children.



A letter from Or Hadash Congregation in Fort Collins about our Cards of Care



"This is a message to trans and nonbinary people across the United States. To the parents of trans and nonbinary kids. To everyone who is showing up at state legislatures across the country fighting the wave of anti-trans legislation that is sweeping this nation. We see you. We see you putting our faith into action with your unwavering love and belief in the worth of dignity of trans kids, and we are here to remind you that you are not alone. And you should know that **Unitarian Universalists across the country - we have your back.**"

- Video Message Created in Partnership with Side with Love -

The Memorial Team continued its invaluable role, supporting six memorial services. Their dedication to facilitating meaningful memorials provided comfort and closure for grieving families, weaving a supportive tapestry within our community.

As a congregation, we are called to honor and mark the cycle of living and dying as a community. These are the names of the beloved members of our congregation who died in 2023:

Adam Artis
Rani Campbell
Bob Fromme

Karen Hart
Bob Hill
Francie Lane

Dan Leatherman
Art Leissa
Muriel McIntire

Richard Osborne
Evie Weddel
Brian Woodruff

Justice and Service

"We recognize and dismantle prejudice and oppression in all their forms, including within ourselves, allowing us to be more effective and trusted partners to marginalized communities in Northern Colorado and beyond."

and

"Foothills is a leader in Northern Colorado in developing sustainable, innovative, intersectional approaches to caring for our earth and its people to ensure a greater flourishing of all life."

From Our Foothills Bold Vision Statements



Linkage: Deepening Community Partnerships

In 2023, we initiated intentional conversations with key community partners, reinforcing our unwavering commitment to an intersectional approach to justice and service. These purposeful dialogues, featuring key collaborators such as the Food Bank for Larimer County, Habitat for Humanity, Family Housing Network, ISAAC, Trees Water People, Homeward Alliance, La Cocina, UUSC, and Out Boulder, were led by Rev. Gretchen Haley, Board Members, and Lay Leaders. These gatherings explicitly reaffirmed our dedication to partnership values and shared visions, guiding our strategic planning framework for the next five years and immediate actions.

By actively engaging with and following the lead of the most impacted communities, we aim to dismantle barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable Northern Colorado. Our work recognizes that the intersectionality of these challenges demands comprehensive and collaborative solutions to foster a community where all can thrive.

Grants

Our efforts to further intersectional justice, deepen our partnership with other area nonprofits, and ensure Northern Colorado is a sanctuary for all were recognized through significant grants in 2023.

\$20,000 from The Fund for Unitarian Universalist Social Responsibility to fund our Justice and Service Ministries. This grant exemplifies that Foothills Unitarian is a leader in our faith community in bringing Unitarian Universalist values to life through action.

\$6,920.00 from The Community Foundation to support our justice and service initiatives in collaboration with other area nonprofits. By deepening partnerships with other nonprofits, we can amplify our collective impact and create meaningful change in our community.

\$5,000 from The Bohemian Fund to support our LBGT+ youth programs.

Making Northern Colorado a Sanctuary

Immigration Justice Highlights

In 2023, our Immigration Justice team regrouped, focusing on strengthening our partnership with ISAAC, better understanding the gaps in our work for immigration justice, and expanding the concept of sanctuary across our whole community. Our work with ISAAC led to us initiating a new interfaith effort, **Driving Toward Justice: Driving and Accompanying Immigrants**. Often new immigrants to Fort Collins do not have their own transportation. Unfortunately the public transit system is often unavailable to them because of location and transfers required. The purpose of the program is to offer rides to those immigrants who need transportation, for example, to doctor's appointments, appointments with attorneys, and court appointments. Members of the team also offer accompaniment through complex and unfamiliar systems.

Our Immigration Justice team also began hosting **Hablamos** in 2023, a monthly gathering where people can practice Spanish in a safe, supportive community.

Another development in our Immigration Justice work is around **long-term solutions for welcoming immigrants** into our community. Over the last year, non-profits and faith partners have convened a series of conversations to create a long-term solution to address the influx of immigrants arriving in our community with hospitality and sustainability as core values. The conversation includes ISAAC, Fuerza Latina, Alianza NORCO, and La Cocina, along with Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Peak Community Church, Plymouth United Church of Christ, Trinity Lutheran, Christ Community Health Clinic, and a new initiative organized by one of our members, Sarah Hathcock, organizing physicians in support of health care for immigrants.

Finally, after reflective discussions with La Cocina and ISAAC, our Immigration Justice Team decided to pause our Sanctuary Everywhere program, founded in 2019, through which we have accompanied asylum seekers as they settle in Fort Collins. This pause aims to reassess our approach, specifically addressing how systemic barriers and power imbalances may impede our effectiveness as partners. We are planning a series of conversations with immigrants who have become part of the Colorado community in the last ten years as well as other organizations that are doing this work to authentically identify opportunities for our congregation to be effective partners in this work.

Reproductive Justice Highlight

Our Reproductive Justice Task Force (RJTF) took off in 2023 and is showing up to ensure our values of bodily autonomy and liberation for all are made real in the world. The team has mobilized to **expand Our Whole Lives** (OWL) sexuality education, which takes an intersectional approach to reproductive justice and sexuality education, centering the lived experiences of traditionally marginalized communities, including LGBTQIA+ and disabled people and People of Color.

The RJTF has also **trained as Planned Parenthood escorts**, connected with UU churches in Wyoming and other areas where abortion rights are threatened, held documentary watch parties, engaged with elected officials, and is **actively partnering with the League of Women Voters** in advocating for legislation that secures reproductive freedom in our state.

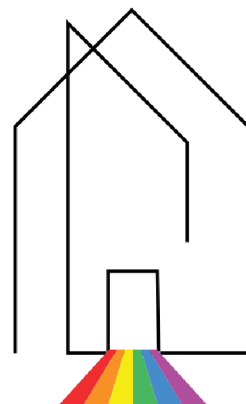


RJTF writes thank you cards to Legislators who support reproductive justice

Making Northern Colorado a Sanctuary

Rainbow Villages: Building Sanctuary Amidst Adversity

In the face of escalating anti-LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) legislation and hate across the nation, Foothills Unitarian proudly launched Rainbow Villages, an initiative aimed at creating sanctuary and support for transgender and nonbinary individuals and their families seeking refuge from states with discriminatory laws. This visionary project takes an intersectional approach, addressing not only LGBT+ Justice but also weaving threads of economic, healthcare, immigration, and racial justice.



Rainbow Villages

Thousands of trans individuals and their families are already leaving their home states due to oppressive conditions, and more are considering relocation. In 2023, The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee reached out seeking a congregation to welcome trans and nonbinary people moving to Northern Colorado, including providing a minimum of three months of housing and assistance navigating healthcare, transportation, and employment. **Foothills Unitarian answered the call. So far, we have helped two single individuals, one couple, and one family of five settle. Additionally, we have supported four other congregations in Colorado in launching their own Rainbow Villages.** Our commitment is grounded in unleashing courageous love and making sanctuary a reality for as many people as possible.

Gender Fluent

In February 2023, we embarked on a series delving into the sacredness of all genders, challenging congregations to be curious, conversant, and courageous in their understanding. We explored gender roles, masculinity, and how to combat right-wing propaganda.

GenderFluent

FEBRUARY 2023 SERIES

The response was overwhelming, with nearly 600 unique attendees on Sundays, including 50 newcomers. We welcomed queer theorist & author Kathryn Bond Stockton as our guest speaker at a Sunday service, and 21 people participated in a book study of *Gender(s)* by Kathryn Bond Stockton.

An innovative aspect of the series was the "Grandparents Trying to Understand Gender" group, engaging 16 grandparents in exploring ways to support their trans and nonbinary grandkids.

Foothills Unitarian ministers and staff transformed this series into a curriculum to resource other congregations in exploring gender.

Climate Justice

In 2023, our Climate Justice Team focused deeply on building resiliency, one of the key initiatives of our Green Sanctuary commitment. Green Sanctuary 2023 is a UUA accreditation program for congregations committed to engaging with the climate crisis. The three focuses of Green Sanctuary are **Resilience**, **Mitigation**, and **Justice**.

Resilience: “Foothills Unitarian congregation will foster the skills of personal resilience, weave strong webs of community resilience, and advocate for greater resilience in our infrastructure and natural systems.”

We engaged deeply with the Green Sanctuary pillar of resilience in 2023, offering multiple programs centering on Active Hope. Based on the work of Joanna Macy, Active Hope is a practice for strengthening our resilience and finding clarity around how we can play a part in the healing of our communities and our planet. 24 people attended the weekend Active Hope Retreat with Kathleen Rude, 23 people participated in our Active Hope book discussion, and 52 people participated in our Active Hope Journey Groups. Active Hope is now an ongoing practice through our Climate Resilience Circle.



Active Hope Retreat
April 2023

Mitigation: “Foothills Unitarian congregation will commit to reduce the causes of global warming and severe climate impacts and to make possible a transition to a regenerative and just future for all.”

From speakers to discussion groups to our community garden, we encourage community members to engage in mitigation efforts. As a church, we also engage directly in mitigation, including equipping our new building with net-zero capacity, and moving forward with our commitment to installing solar panels.

Justice: “Foothills Unitarian congregation will support communities impacted by pollution and climate change through establishing working partnerships with local organizations leading efforts to address historical and cultural inequalities.”

As part of our Green Sanctuary commitment to Climate Justice, we have begun collaborating across Climate Justice and Immigration Justice this year. We engage in legislative advocacy locally in Fort Collins and at the state level.

Trees, Water, People (TWP) is our Climate Justice Partner, and in 2023, we engaged in intentional conversations with TWP leaders to discern our vision for the next five years of partnership. TWP, an environmental organization with a human focus, believes a sustainable future is only possible when young people, women and girls, and Indigenous peoples have a real say in decisions that affect their well-being.

Justice and Service: LGBTQIA Ministry

A Drag Christmas Spectacular: A Celebration of Queer Joy

More than four years ago, Rev. Sean envisioned a Drag Christmas event that could be a joyful holiday home for the Northern Colorado LGBTQIA+ community. He and Rev. Gretchen worked steadily toward bringing that dream to life, and in 2023, we saw the years of work culminate in the magic of A Drag Christmas Spectacular.

With an original script by Rev. Sean and Fort Collins-based Drag Queen Krisa Gonna, and in collaboration with talented Northern Colorado drag queens, the local production celebrated the queer experience, offering a space where all could feel seen, heard, and celebrated. **More than 700 people** - over half of whom had not previously visited Foothills - attended one of the two shows in our brand new sanctuary.



A Drag Christmas Spectacular's Finale Number to Pink's "Raise Your Glass"

True You: Nurturing Identities, Building Connections

In 2023, True You, a monthly gathering for gender-expansive, gender-fluid, trans, and non-binary kids aged 4-12 and their families, grew to **58 members** and provided a safe and affirming environment. In 2023, we expanded this program with "True You: Parents of Adult Transgender Kids," which offers support, joy, and resources to **15 parents** with adult gender-creative and transgender children.

Unleashing Courageous Love In Northern Colorado

We were once again proud to be a sponsor of Northern Colorado Pride. This year, we offered glitter blessings at our booth. The positive response was so overwhelming, we are exploring a separate multi-faith booth dedicated solely to glitter blessings for NOCO Pride 2024.

Widening our Welcome: Trans Inclusion Workshop

We held our first Trans Inclusion in UU Congregations six-session workshop. The curriculum, developed by the Transforming Hearts Collective (trans religious professionals at the Unitarian Universalist Association) focuses on how to create congregations that are fully inclusive and affirming of the full breadth of gender diversity. Eight congregants who work closely in our LGBT+ ministry and serve on our Radical Welcome Team participated in this curriculum. We look forward to continuing this training with a new cohort of participants in 2024.

Justice & Service by The Numbers

In 2023, over 200 people served through our justice and service teams.

From volunteering at our mobile food pantry to contributing to the Multifaith Habitat Build, from housing transgender refugees fleeing persecution to advocating for reproductive healthcare in Northern Colorado—our community has been steadfast in its mission to unleash Courageous Love in Northern Colorado and beyond. Our justice and service teams work across seven key areas with a particular focus on spaces where these justice efforts intersect: Climate Justice, Food Security, Housing Justice, Immigration Justice, LGBTQIA+ Equity, Racial Justice, and Reproductive Justice.

Through our 'Share the Plate' program, we've empowered community and Unitarian Universalist faith partners with **\$47,760** to advance essential services and initiatives. Our 2023 Share the Plate partners:

- La Cocina
- Black Lives of Unitarian Universalists (BLUU)
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
- Faith Family Hospitality
- Trees Water People
- Diverse & Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM)
- Habitat for Humanity
- Disabled Resource Services
- Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains
- Homeward Alliance
- Food Bank for Larimer County
- Interfaith Solidarity and Accompaniment Coalition (ISAAC)



Through **Faith Family Hospitality**, we continue to host, feed and support families experiencing homelessness for four weeks every year. As our building was under construction in 2023, First United Methodist and Plymouth Congregational Church physically hosting the families during our four weeks, while we continued to provide volunteers and meals. In 2023, **we hosted 13 adults and 16 children**. There were an average of **31 volunteers for each hosting**, and a whopping **704 volunteer hours** for the four weeks.



Through our partnership with **The Food Bank for Larimer County**, we host twice-monthly mobile food bank. **170 volunteers** are currently in our Food Bank volunteer group! The youth group also volunteers with the Food Bank throughout the year.



Through our partnership with **Habitat for Humanity**, we participated in the interfaith build. We also help sponsor the build, delivering on our commitment to provide **\$5,000** toward the build in 2023. Rev. Gretchen provided the blessing for this year's home at the interfaith gathering where construction officially began.



We partnered with **La Familia/The Family Center** for the 10th year in a row, providing **137 local kids** with Christmas gifts!

Looking Ahead to 2024

As we look ahead to 2024 and all of the personal and collective challenges and opportunities we see on the horizon, we believe our shared ministry must focus on offering the **perspective**, the **people**, and the **practices** for three shifts to manifest in our individual and collective lives, whatever this year brings:

- A shift from Isolation and Loneliness to **Deepening Belonging**
- A shift from Dread to **Joyful Resilience**
- A shift from Powerlessness to **Collective Courage**

The perspectives, people, and practices to make these three shifts must be held in the **power of our covenant**, a safe container of promises and repair where we can practice, learn, change, and grow together. Growing is uncomfortable and requires mistakes, awkwardness, and struggle. The practice and tradition of covenant is what makes this growth possible.

Save the Dates - An Overview of Key 2024 Events

| | |
|---|--|
| February 17: Valentine's Queer Dance Party | July 29-August 2: Chalice Camp |
| February 25: Town Hall | August 11: Water Ceremony |
| March 17: Spring Children's Choir Begins | August 18: Return to two services (9 & 11 AM) |
| March 28: Maundy Thursday Vespers Service | Backpack Blessing |
| March 31: Easter Services | August 30-September 1: Buckhorn Family Retreat |
| April 13-14: Building Dedication/Ribbon Cutting | September 7: Choir Retreat |
| April 18-20: Pacific Western Regional Assembly | October 26-November 1: Grand Canyon Retreat |
| April 21: Earth Day Service | October 27: Remembrance Sunday |
| May 5: All Music Sunday | Pumpkin Carving |
| May 12: Switch to One Service at 10 AM | December 8: Congregational Meeting |
| June 2: Flower Ceremony | December 20-21: A Drag Christmas Spectacular |
| Congregational Meeting | December 24: Christmas Eve |

A Preview of Series Themes in 2024

Not all of our series are finalized yet, but based on feedback from our community and our sense of the big questions we are facing this year, here are a few of the series we have planned for the year ahead....

- February: All Bodies Are Sacred - Healing Our Culture of Body Hierarchy
- March: A series on death and dying
- April: The Future is Wild - cultivating imagination and optimism for our collective futures
- May/June: Nature/Being - Finding our place in the interdependent web and exploring the ideas and practices of Wild Church
- July/August: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Faith

If you haven't yet become an official member of Foothills, we invite you to take that step of commitment and community this year as we travel together in a journey of belonging, resilience, and courage, held in the power and practice of our covenant. Visit foothillsuu.org/membership or email Engagement Manager Lauren Farley at lauren@foothillsuu.org.

Leadership & Staff

2022/2023 Board of Trustees

Walter Nash, President
Mary Klecan, Vice President
Sue Bloomfield, Treasurer
Linda Kothera, Secretary
Beth Adams, Trustee
John Hill, Trustee
Diana Hutchinson, Trustee
Joan Woodbury, Trustee

Ministers

Rev. Gretchen Haley, Senior Minister
Rev. Sean Neil-Barron, Associate Minister
Rev. Elaine Aron-Tenbrink, Assistant Minister

Staff

Katie Watkins, Director of Finance & Operations
Eleanor VanDeusen, Director of Family Ministry
Benjamin Hanson, Music Director
Kelsey DiAstra, Creative & Communications Manager
Lauren Farley, Family Ministry & Engagement Manager
Jennifer Powell, Operations & Events Manager
Holly Ayala, Facilities Coordinator
Caitlin Seifert, Family Ministry Assistant and Administrative Coordinator
Vanessa Way, Bookkeeper
Kara Shobe, Children's Music Leader
Amber Lamb, Spirit Play Leader
Jordan Scott, Preschool Leader



The Foothills Worship Team on Celebrate Anyway Sunday, October 2023



Foothills Unitarian

LOVE UNITES US ALL

visit foothills.love