

**Brecksville United Methodist Church
2024 Charge Conference**

Creating Safe Space To Grow With God And One Another

Lay Leader's Report

Brecksville United Methodist Church has experienced a strong 2023-2024 church year. There is a sense of optimism, strength and internal growth (in faith and numbers!) as a Congregation. We are experiencing God in new ways, led by Rev. Heidi Welch and our wonderful Church Staff.

The most profound changes have occurred in our governing structure. After much prayerful study, contemplation and planning throughout 2023, and a special Church Conference vote of BUMC Members, our congregation implemented the Simplified Accountability Structure in 2024. The traditional UMC committees (Church Council, Staff Parish, Finance and Trustees) have been combined into the single Leadership Board, composed of nine members. Those nine members are a great mix of long-standing BUMC Members, as well as more recent BUMC Members who bring fresh new insights to all discussions. Very importantly, all discussions and decisions are guided by BUMC's Mission and Vision Framework.

Additionally, our new Ministry Teams perform the actual day-to-day functions that the former traditional Committees previously performed. Most of those Ministry Teams are gradually ramping up their ministries, and starting to function in a more 'permission giving' structure. If a Ministry Team's actions and programs fit within the BUMC Mission and Vision Framework, and the Leadership Board Guidelines, they have the ability to move forward without first seeking permission from a committee or Leadership Board.

While 2024 is the third straight year where we are operating under a deficit budget (projected expenses are larger than projected revenues), Leadership Board's special Alternative Revenue Work Group has already identified 4 new programs to help reduce that projected deficit, and our Church Family has really become vested in that effort! Through the first ever Brecksville Flea, a Close the Gap! Campaign, a new BUMC Cookbook, and a new Pumpkin Patch, BUMC has generated new revenue sources.

Those efforts do not happen in isolation. As a part of our short term and long term goals to live into our Vision Framework, BUMC is intentionally trying to be more visible in the communities we serve, including participating in community events and parades. And the dual joy of the Brecksville Flea, new Cookbook and Pumpkin Patch is that these fund raising efforts simultaneously are opportunities to invite connection with our local communities.

Our intentional outreach takes many other forms. Our terrific Vacation Bible School reaches both our own and many community children. Our Bike Ministry repairs donated bikes, and then gives them to people in need. This summer, the Bike Ministry gave away its 1,000th bike! And we reach out in Cleveland, to the unhoused by helping Trials for Hope and the assembly of sleeping mats made from plastic grocery bags; to immigrants through helping Nehemiah Ministry UMC; to those in need by helping to prepare and serve meals at Pearl Road UMC; and

to the hungry by gathering excess restaurant frozen meals and distributing them to shelters and assistance centers in our greater community. One of our dear Church Family Members also just served yet again as Jesus' hands and feet in ministry to Camphor Mission in Liberia.

But effective external outreach can only occur as a result of effective internal ministry to our Church Family, to provide rejuvenating joy and a firm foundation in our relationship with Jesus. BUMC's strong children's ministries, youth ministries, adult Sunday School, Bible Studies and special program offerings enable each of us opportunities to grow in our faith journeys. Isn't it a joy to see how many children now participate in the weekly Children's Moment during Sunday Service?

Rev. Welch also has a gift at choosing and delivering each sermon series that helps our Church Family hear messages just at the time we need to hear them. Whether it is urging us to 'get off our donkeys' like the Good Samaritan, to see God like a child does, to be on a faith road trip, or to undertake a *Kindness Campaign* to Do Unto Others, Pastor Heidi is always challenging us to better understand the teaching of Jesus, and to find practical ways to live out those lessons every day.

Pastor Heidi also provides great comfort and care to so many. And she is helping our laity to realize their own gifts of compassion, by serving others through our Congregational Care Team.

While we have had numerous funerals and life celebrations for our dearly departed Church Family Members, we have also found balance with baptisms, new Members and participants. To me, there is a general feeling of optimism, people want to be a part of this wonderful Church Family, and people are looking for new ways to be involved. And we hope to discover new ways to help them do just that.

Out of the first days of the COVID Pandemic, our Church Family maintained desperately needed connection through a brand new online ministry. We started that first Sunday following COVID Shutdown with a very small service streamed online from an iPhone. But we accepted the challenge and steep learning curve, invested in new video equipment, and now our online ministry has grown to reach hundreds every week, with viewers locally and from numerous states and countries. Our combined in-person and online attendance each Sunday has rebounded Post-Pandemic to 300-400 in any given week! And a majority of the last 3 new members' classes all had their first touch with BUMC through our online ministry! Now the challenge and opportunity is to figure out ways to better involve into our Church Life and Church Family many of those people who participate only online.

The opportunities to grow in our faith journey are many. As a Church Family, we are seeking to find the right opportunities that fit our Mission and Vision Framework, and give us the ability to live and practice the teachings of our beloved Jesus Christ. Won't you join us on that wonderful journey?

Respectfully Submitted,
Alan W. Scheufler, Lay Leader and
Chair of Leadership Board