

## **2022 Annual Meeting Elders' Report**

Bobbie Benjamin and Julie Steiner, Co-Moderators

Members: Ibidun Awoyale, Winston Bramwell, Kris Forrest, Corlis Gross, Pat Malley, Tony Merlo, Joanna Robinson

The elders mostly met monthly with a few extra meetings concerning timely topics thrown in. We met a few times with the Admin Committee to discuss financial and budgeting issues. When the Elders meet, we begin and end in prayer, to remind us that our work is to care for the congregation, staff, buildings, and ministries while keeping Old First's mission and vision at the fore.

We are profoundly aware of and grateful for the leadership of Old First's ministry teams and staff. Everything that the elders "did" was first generated and then accomplished by those teams and staff. For example, it was easy to say "yes" to thoughtful plans to say farewell to the shelter and to start a Sunday night dinner program (thank you, Outreach SLG!). It was easy to say "yes" to ending a contract with a disappointing carpenter and hiring a new one, completing the moving of the office to the social hall, and setting up the capacity to have hybrid worship services (thank you, SEAC!). It was easy to say "yes" to an alarm system and cement work and contracts and to keep an eye on the church's financials when our buildings and finances are maintained with such fidelity and our congregation is so generous (thank you, Admin and Stewardship!). It was easy to say "yes" to worship innovations and to celebrate our increased ability to bridge the in-person/online divide (thank you, Worship and newly-formed Tech Team!).

The Elders also recognize the million seen and unseen ways that Devan and Michael have shepherded all the work that has been accomplished this year. Old First's ministry has been able to not only function during the past year of "return" and "new normal," but we have continued to grow into and adapt to these changes in ways that will benefit us as we move forward. We are so grateful for your leadership and work on our behalf.

Through our collective work this year, Old First has finished (mostly) sanctuary renovations that have begun to help us think about ways to revitalize our worship and open our space to the community as a performance and meeting venue. We are ready for the groundbreaking on Old First House. We have returned to worship in the sanctuary and maintained a masking policy that has made our most vulnerable members as safe as possible when returning in person. Companionship groups begun during the lockdown phase of the pandemic continue to connect members of our congregation with each other and with God. And we continue to be a congregation generous in money, time, and talents, as we have seen with the success of the Sanctuary campaign, closing the annual budget in the black, and with a host of new and returning leaders stepping into leadership positions in 2023. Old First continues to evolve because of all of you: your commitment and creativity keep our ministries relevant and thriving.

Our congregation has much to look forward to in 2023. Old First House will transform our ministries with formerly unhoused people. We want to also maintain our commitment to currently unhoused persons with our Saturday breakfast and clothing cupboard and Sunday evening dinner programs. An ad-hoc Sanctuary Use committee has been formed and tasked with developing policies and processes for using our beautifully renovated space. We look forward to reinvigorating our work camp programs, offering experiential mission education to groups from outside our city. We will continue to work on engaging our members online and in person and on developing hybrid experiences that bring us together.

As we look toward completing all these projects and moving forward together, Old First's Elders need to consider areas of growth like membership, leadership development, and the renewal of a discernment committee. Our 300th Anniversary is in 2027, a date that suddenly seems impossibly close. Thoughts about a long-range plan were scuttled by the whack-a-mole nature of responding to an evolving pandemic and the very tangible building projects that will house us for the long-range future. We would do well to take a breath in 2023 and consider where Old First wants to be in 5 and 10 years. And like it or not, part of that conversation probably includes pastoral transition planning and staff considerations moving forward.

The work of Old First's Elders is ongoing and never dull. As we step down as Co-Moderators who began our service in February 2020 and have spent the past 6 years as elders, we want to thank all who have served with us as Elders and have held Old First's mission and vision at the fore as we navigated all the changes and opportunities the pandemic necessitated. We thank the staff who have enacted that mission and vision. And we thank the congregation who have said and continue to say "yes," who step out in faith to meet the challenges of our neighbors, city, and world, and who continue to pray with us through all the transitions that are to come.

Faithfully,  
Bobbie Benjamin and Julie Steiner