

2025 Annual Meeting Elders' Report for January 25 Annual Meeting

Elders: Ibidun Awoyale, Rae Conley, Kris Forrest, Dave Killian, Pat Malley, Sarah Sherr
Joanna Robinson and Kathy Sykes, Co-Moderators

The Elders held monthly meetings via Zoom except for the month of July. When the Elders meet, we begin and end in prayer, to bring God into each meeting and pray for guidance as we care for the congregation, staff, buildings, ministries, and finances while keeping and furthering Old First's mission and vision. We are joined at the beginning of each meeting by the Financial Secretary and Treasurer for a review of our financial well-being.

We are grateful for the leadership of Old First's ministry teams. We are also grateful for the volunteers from within the church family and the many volunteers from other places that contribute to our ability to do the work of service that we do. We thank Michael for his leadership in all aspects of church life: his skill and ability to lead worship and focus on our spiritual development, his ability to relate to everyone in any phase of their journey, his commitment and ongoing social justice ministry, his hands on approach to day to day church operation including continued repair and restoration within the church and courtyard, and his continued dedication to Old First House and its residents and staff .

We are excited to have 19 new members join our congregation this past fall and appreciate and thank Michael for growing the congregation. We are excited that so many of them have gotten involved and found ways of being active that reflect their interests. We look forward to seeing all our new members become actively involved as well as our current members. We are also happy to welcome more visitors in church in the past year.

Our church administrator, Arthur Casey Conan, continues his work and commitment to the smooth operation of Old First. The Elders recognize the multitude of ways, seen and unseen, that Michael and Arthur have shepherded all the work that has been accomplished this year. Bill Lowden, our Music Director, has been a blessing to our music ministry. We appreciate his talents and music.

As a church, we recognized and embraced both the opportunity and challenge of hybrid worship. Michael welcomed us to be at church, whether in person or on zoom, encouraging more in-person worship, while maintaining commitment and welcome to those who are unable to be in person, regardless of the reason. Talented tech desk volunteers aid us.

For the third year in a row, Elders completed our responsibilities in conducting an evaluation of the performance of the Pastor. We also completed evaluations for our Music Director and our Church Administrator by a committee of elders and members. We are committed to an annual evaluation process for all employees.

The Elders met as a group with several of the leaders of our SLGs and appointed directors including Administration, Congregational Life, Outreach, Sanctuary Use, and Stewardship as part of our regular Elders meetings. These opportunities for dialogue are extremely valuable and provide us with ideas and insights. The recently created Pet policy is an example of collaboration between members of Admin SLG and Elders. The Elders held a retreat in November with SLGs and leaders within the church to enable us all to be better informed about what is working and to learn how we can work more effectively. We plan to continue dialogue with leaders on a regular basis.

Our outreach programs benefitted greatly from the generosity of time, talent, and resources evidenced through the Outreach Campaign in 2024 which raised over \$10,000 and allowed us to hire part time staff to support the work of outreach ministry. Our outreach and summer camp programs were invigorated with the hiring of Deanna Salpietra who served in a transitional capacity to organize and develop tools and bring additional support and structure to these programs. A part-time staff support person was added this past year.

We would like to grow our summer camps beyond the current numbers; it has become more challenging to recruit groups. We maintained our commitment to our guests with our Saturday clothing cupboard and began offering regular sit-down breakfasts again. We have also hosted several evening dinners. We have enjoyed having the support of other churches and groups in our outreach ministry, particularly the Saturday morning breakfasts. We are blessed with good leaders and good partners. We hope to expand our outreach work further in the coming year. What else are we called to do?

Old First House opened its doors and welcomed its first residents in March 2025. We welcomed our new neighbors with a basket of necessities to make their life easier and framed photographs to make their home feel like a home. We continue to look for ongoing ways of building community as the new residents settle into their new home and neighborhood. The Old First Task force was created to foster communication between the church and OF House through regular monthly meetings, and find ways to interact with our neighbors and make them feel welcome. A pizza night and a Christmas dinner provided opportunities to engage. DePaul USA is working on the organizational challenges of a start-up year and the operation of a new facility. The staff help the residents with the personal challenges as they adapt to living in a place of their own. We will continue to look for opportunities to be supportive.

The church office moved out of the social hall and into our new space for our offices and meeting space. The old office areas were de-constructed. The new community space provided an alternative space for worship in the summer when the AC was not working. We are living and learning in the new space. We are pleased that our Sunday school children and

their teachers are enjoying the new space. Much exterior work and landscaping work around the church and the courtyard have been completed but there is always more we would like to do.

We continue to be a congregation generous in money, time, and talents, as we have seen with the success of the Sanctuary campaign, the Outreach Campaign and supporting the needs of the church ministry and staff through the annual budget. Old First continues to evolve because of all of you, 300 years strong and growing!!

As we look to 2026 and beyond:

1. Leadership – Two new elders will join the Board of Elders, and a new leader of congregational life will be appointed.
2. **300th Anniversary** planning for 2026 and 2027 is underway. A Planning Committee began discussing ideas for this significant milestone. There will be many opportunities for service. We hope to see all church members involved in some capacity.
3. Looking ahead to how the church supports its neighbors at Old First House and our outreach work in our city.
4. Identify more rentals for our sanctuary space as a means of increasing both income and engagement with the community.
5. Projects to be completed: Additional lighting and signage will be added to the courtyard, archives returned from storage and reinstalled in new cabinets in our new building.
6. Physical plants issues within the church building to be considered: Electric Power and HVAC needs, Kitchen and bathroom renovations and financing for these projects.
7. As we look even further, pastoral transition planning and other staff considerations must be a part of future conversations.

We are blessed to have a vibrant congregation that has grown and thrived over its entire history. With God's help, we will continue the ministry we are called upon to do.

Rooted in Faith and Growing in Love, 300 years strong!

Faithfully,
Joanna and Kathy