

# Annual Report

## 01. Pastoral Team

**by Pastor Steve**

Japan is so good at embracing the seasons. 2023 at Tokyo Union Church has felt like a springtime of new life. The early pandemic years of 2020–2021 felt like a long cold winter, but as Ecclesiastes 3 says, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” 2023 was a delightful year of blossoming and new growth. We are reminded that God is always at work, even in the dark seasons when we can’t see what God is doing.

2022 was an exciting year of thawing after the long winter. Our 150th Anniversary celebrations jump started us, energized by President Catherine Sasanuma, with a year of thanks for God’s faithfulness and looking to God’s future. The finale of our 150th celebrations was the interview with gracious filmmaking legend Martin Scorsese, our brother in Christ and now friend of TUC. He helped us remember the experience of Christians persecuted in Japan for so many years, as well as his life of making sense of following Jesus while telling a story of hope and faith in a world of violence. Kane Mitani and I worked together on this project for over a year, quietly behind the scenes, until the live interview with Mr. Scorsese on Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023 (by Zoom). It was inspiring for a packed sanctuary and for the 3.2 thousand viewers who have seen the initial interview on YouTube, plus another 1.5 thousand viewers who watched the second version including Japanese language transcription (both at [www.tokyounion.org/scorsese](http://www.tokyounion.org/scorsese)). It brought a lot of attention and connections to TUC from around the world.

Reflecting on the Scorsese interview reminds me of how much work goes on unseen in the life of Tokyo Union Church – God’s unseen work and the unseen work of so many humble and devoted volunteers. To the 4.7 thousand people who have watched it, the Scorsese event may look like just another hour of talking. But it took over a year of unseen time and loving labor to nurture our

connection with Mr. Scorsese and his production company, and to refine the interview flow and questions. Additionally, it took the amazing planning and execution by our Audio Visual Team that made this available to the whole world. This event is like a parable of 2023, a year of blooming and fruition after a long winter of God's quiet, faithful work through many generous servants during the long dark night.

Our AV team members have helped transform our life together. We owe them great thanks. They are rarely seen because they are on the back side of the camera and microphones. Led and organized by Risa Kikura and now Ayumi Ito, these faithful servants do the invisible work that helps thousands of people connect to God and God's people at Tokyo Union Church. Jonathan Oh gives many hundreds of hours to design, build, and improve our AV and digital infrastructure. Our Livestream system, our WiFi access in the building, our sound and camera systems are all improved by Jonathan's labors of love. He continues with more improvements still to come throughout the building, and it's almost all invisible to nearly everybody.

Our digital connections allow more people to connect for prayer, study, and fellowship online. Many hundreds are able to join in our worship life who otherwise could not reach TUC or any church at all. And every week still we have people come to Omotesando on Sunday for the first time after they have been joining in worship online for weeks, or many months, or even years. Their first time in the sanctuary is a very special connection to witness. It is like spring rising from invisible growth God has been nurturing through years of dark and quiet.

The explosion of children's participation has been a great joy. Our Princeton Seminary Intern and Youth & Children's Ministry Director, Byron Walker, has quietly done an excellent job of organizing children's Sunday School and preparing the teachers with solid, biblically grounded curriculum. We average several dozen children each week and they love their Sunday School experience.

We have an adult new members class of 10 preparing to join the church right now, several of them have stayed connected in recent months via the LiveStream. There are more planning to join soon. Our confirmation class is also joining the church. We will have 10 baptisms in the next two months. We had record numbers of hundreds of worshippers on Easter – a stark contrast to Easter 2020 when only 25 of us were allowed in the sanctuary to produce our first and unexpected Livestream Easter.

At TUC we are blessed by the humble, faithful service of so many unsung members and friends God uses to make our life possible. Our Coffee Hour food and fellowship are generously prepared, served, and cleaned up by Bianca and her team. The church's money is carefully managed by our Finance Ministry Team. Our glorious worship music comes from musicians who give many hours to diligent preparation and rehearsal. These and more are all things God does, and unseen by most people. Quietly, God faithfully supplies and orchestrates the Body of Christ, the Church, for faithful ministry to lift up the name of Jesus.

Finally, there is one more big thing God has been preparing for the past four years that most of us didn't see coming. We were so grateful that in 2020 God called to us a fabulously gifted, Jesus-loving Associate Pastor in the Rev. Héctor Herrera. But little did we know then that God was preparing him to become our next Pastor! I am thrilled that God has called such a gifted and special pastor to serve and lead TUC into our next faithful step. I can think of no one better prepared for this important work.

It has been a great honor to serve Tokyo Union Church for the past four and a half years, throughout the pandemic and now to the waking of a glorious new day. Alison joins me in thanks for the privilege of serving with you.

Jesus Christ is risen and alive, healing the world, making us a new creation. God has been at work, even in the bleak years and when we struggled to make sense of it all. As God says in Isaiah 43:19:

*Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

God is doing a new thing at Tokyo Union Church. We are blessed to be a part of it and share it with our neighbors. To God be the glory!

## 02. Administration Team

Post Covid Principles

**by Catherine Sasanuma**

Spring is upon us and there is much for us to update and report on as we both review the past year and look toward the future. We have much for which to be thankful and much to report to our Congregation. Many changes and initiatives are upon us and we're excited to share our efforts moving forward.

In 2023 the Admin Team worked with the Council on some key issues to develop our "new normal" in light of the post-covid world. We re-examined our congregations' needs. Like every other congregation TUC had had to re-think TUC priorities after Covid. As we emerged from the worst of the covid challenges we affirmed that we are still guided by same core principles. Of Grounded in Christ, Open to All, Active in Joyful Service and Integrated in Community.

However, the Council needed more information to adapt and respond in a Post Covid world. Nick Ashley led the Council in a three-month dialogue asking one simple question: how can we remain God's House and our home to our Congregation in a post covid world?

We wanted to make sure we were on the right track in defining and re-affirming our priorities. We ended up embracing these core priorities.

### **Belonging**

TUC members strongly long for a sense of **belonging** after the Covid years.

## **Connection in Community**

The physical separation we endured during covid meant that our bonds of fellowship, friendship, serving and learning were tested. With the worst of the pandemic behind us (and praise God for that), we embrace in-person fellowship. A physical space allows us to strengthen these bonds.

## **Being Connected- Finding our Connectors**

To engage in vibrant community we need to find those people in our congregation who will be our "connectors". Community takes people working to bring people together toward in common vision: to grow, to learn, and to deepen our Christian fellowship.

## **Digital Ministry: A priority that opens new questions**

Continuing to strongly embrace the **Digital Worship and Learning Ministry**. Our digital ministry gave us a way to continue to lead and nurture our congregation during Covid . For those of us who are separated by distance we'll continue this offering which reaches over 100 people every week. On-line opportunities also serve our older TUC members. That said, we have found that our digital ministry also comes with questions—and that we don't yet have all the answers. For example; Can on-line worshipers be members? Who are our on-line participants? What needs are we meeting? How can we stay better connected to our Alumni through on line meetings? (Already the Meet-Ups of Alumni and members has taken root). We don't have the answers yet but we know we need to explore how to ensure that digital ministry leads to growing in Christ and results in connectedness needed for Christian community.

We welcome members' comments on all the above questions posted about our Digital Ministry.

## **By-Laws**

Tokyo Union Church is an independent union church so governing documents are extremely important. It's been over a decade since our by-laws were last updated in 2011. Although a heroic effort was put in by Jim Anderson, Karl K, Anita Gesling and Jody Fuller to update the By-Laws in 2013-14, they did not reach the finish line of Council approval.

Jody Fuller and Alan Sorba took on this task again through 2023, meeting every Wednesday. The following amendments regarding the organization of the Council were adopted:

- Community Life became a full eldership to reflect the value of Belonging
- Property and Use became a ministry to reflect the aging nature of the church and give decision makers a seat at the Council table for big decisions.
- Outreach was reorganized under the Admin Team under the direction of two co-leaders



Many parts of the 2011 by-laws were no longer relevant and this update will serve as an important guide to elders for many years to come

In April 2023 the Council voted to approve the new by-laws. This concluded a year of work and many Council discussions.

## TUC's Structure & Bylaws

Evangelism	Children, Youth & Families	Spiritual Formation	Hospitality & Community Life	W&M
Greeters	Children	Adult Education	Men & Women's Fellowship	Ushers
Arts	VBS	Prayer Group & Chain	Congregational Care (1)	Altar Guild
Special Events	Youth	Prayer & Healing	Coffee Hour	Flower Team
Alpha	Young Adult	Stewardship	Alumni Relations	AV Team
				Lectors
				Music

Nominating	Personnel	Finance	Property & Technology	Admin	Shukyo Hojin	TUCF
Membership	Care for Pastors	Financial Mgmt & Reporting	Property Management	Documentation	External Reporting	External Reporting
Filling Vacancies	Staff Contracts	Giving Programs	Safety Committee	Outreach (2)	Contracts	
Membership Directory	Staff Reviews	Development	Technology	Communications		
Assimilation		Investment Committee		Leadership & Elder Training		
		Counters				

(Please see the charge with changes highlighted in a different color and also the detailed list of changes to the By-Laws in the Addendum.)

### TUC's Campaign for Tomorrow

When we celebrated our 150th anniversary in 2022 we gave praise to God for our last 150 years. We now look to our next 150 years and building a sustainable path to the future of sharing the gospel of Christ in Japan.

In 2023 a committee, in consultation with the Finance Committee put forth recommendations

To establish an endowment for operating costs.

To build stronger relations with TUC Alumni

To write the history of Tokyo Union Church from 1980 to present so we are grounded in our past with a vision for the future.

In 2024 we will launch “The Campaign for Tomorrow” to raise \$1.5 million over the next three year. The need for the endowment grows out of the understanding that TUC has experienced major earthquakes, Sars type events and the pandemic which leads to financial instability. The goals are as follows:

## **Endowment**

1. To maintain and enhance our children's, youth and young adults programs. TUC is one of only two English speaking churches in the Tokyo area that has remained committed to providing children and youth programs;
2. Allowing us to recruit and support a second pastor;
3. Continuing our hybrid ministry through worship, bible study and outreach;
4. To help provide and ensure stability through difficult periods. In the months following the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami roughly one third of our congregation fled Japan,. After the onset of the pandemic TUC was closed. In spite of this TUC continued to operate and support our community through hard and lean times. Going forward, an endowment will help stabilize our Church if and when we face future trials.

In support of this effort we moved \$500,000 from the Foundation to kick-off our Campaign for Tomorrow.

## **Alumni Relations**

We want to strengthen our existing relations with our alumni who built Tokyo Union Church.

## **History**

As one of the oldest Christian churches in Japan, the history of TUC is important; the past, with both mistakes and triumphs leads us into the future. We will call on our alumni to help preserve and record this history.

## **Pastoral Changes and Transitions**

In 2023, after four and a half years Pastor Steve Yamaguchi announced his retirement. In the Spring of 2023 the Congregation voted to launch a worldwide senior pastor search. On March 11th of this year, the Congregation elected Pastor Hector Herrera as the next Senior Pastor of TUC. We are confident that Pastor Hector is the right leader to continue TUC's development as a vibrant and loving Christian community.

Stewardship

**by Alan Sorba**



### **How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?**

- Through regular and joyful gatherings of a committed group to study, share on, encourage, and grow spiritually in stewardship;
- From the encouraging messages that were part of the stewardship season;
- By the increase in the number of Financial pledge forms received over the prior year. Several people expressed interest in serving opportunities through submitting Time & Talent pledge forms too.

### **List the activities and the engagement of your ministry this past year.**

In early 2023, we welcomed new and enthusiastic members to our team, affirmed our areas of ministry within stewardship, and brainstormed initiatives for the year.

We met monthly to deepen our relationships by taking turns and sharing a bit about our personal experiences. We then delved in and studied various aspects and materials on stewardship.

A highlight was reading the book *The Equipping Church* by Sue Mallory and sharing what resonated with us from it. We were then blessed to have Sue join us for a special session on her

book on a Sunday in November. Sue is a dear friend of Pastor Steve and her book is about equipping people like you and me to serve in the church and to be equipped to carry out our callings using our unique gifts to be a light for Christ wherever we are. It was rewarding to hear from Sue about her experiences and how just by being open to serving how God has opened doors for her to serve joyfully and to live an adventure.

The year's stewardship season in the fall featured special moments for ministry by Jesper Bjornholt and Becky Agatsuma, Nick Ashley, Christian & Manna Martinu, and Bianca Allen, who inspired us with their messages and with this year's theme in mind from Romans 12: 5-6 - You Belong and You are Uniquely Gifted.

The sermons from our pastors and Dr. Jonathan Walton, president of the Princeton Theological Seminary, also helped us go deeper on the topic.

We're grateful for the beautiful banner hand-made by Julie Fukuda, which encourages us to think about what return we can make to the Lord given all that He has given to us.

And how about that Rally Day? Catherine Sasanuma and a host of others put on a great event to help people learn about ways to get involved at TUC.

This all led us to follow TUC's tradition of submitting our pledges on Dedication Sunday. I'm pleased to report that more than double the number of pledges were received on Dedication Sunday compared to the year before.

All together, TUC received 97 Financial pledge forms for 2024 totaling ¥39.4 million (¥ pledges: 90 forms / ¥17.8 million; \$ pledges: 7 forms / \$152,600). In the prior year, 88 Financial pledge forms were received totaling ¥38.3 million (¥ pledges: 77 forms / ¥16.1 million; \$ pledges: 11 forms / \$168,400).

In total, 38 people expressed interest in 57 serving opportunities through submitting Time & Talent pledge forms. In the prior year, 79 people expressed interest in 151 serving opportunities through submitting Time & Talent pledge forms.

A big thank you to everyone for making this year one to remember!

## 03. Worship & Music

by Jody Fuller





**How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?**

The Worship & Music Ministry Team coordinates and oversees the necessary arrangements for the public worship services and the music program of the church. To carry out this work we depend on the many dedicated volunteers who give generously of their time and talent. Ushers welcome worshipers to every service. Beautiful flowers are arranged weekly to grace our chancel. The sacraments of communion and baptism are prepared with care. Music and singing that uplifts our souls is offered by the Sanctuary choir, Union Praise Team, organists and guest instrumentalists. The audiovisual team ensures that our sound and visual components in worship and in our regular Livestream worship work smoothly every Sunday. In the face of each volunteer is a deep love for God, for one another, and for our beloved TUC.

### **List the activities and the engagement of your ministry this past year.**

ALTAR GUILD - Dima Kato, Leader

2023 was a dynamic year for the Altar Guild. The return to in-person worship and serving the Communion in individual cups for an ever-larger congregation prompted us to learn new ways of preparation of the Holy Sacrament. This also required greater team work, more dedication and longer preparation and clearing up after the service. We were blessed by the passion and dedication of Charles Cook and Nobuko Sato, with the dedication, reliability and experience of Jody Fuller, Anita Gesling and Laurel Yamashita, with the faithfulness and commitment of Yannick Plomteux, with the kind helpfulness of Jennifer Luvanda and we are overjoyed that the Lord has sent us new dedicated members: Naomi Tokuda, Madeleine Newman, Joey Chang and Maiko Itani.

We are having training sessions for the new members and we are preparing a new manual with practical guidelines for all our activities throughout the year.

We praise and thank the Lord for His guidance and support and we thank all who worked and supported the Altar Guild throughout 2023.

Altar Guild members: Jody Fuller, Charles Cook, Nobuko Sato, Yuko Horiuchi, Laurel Yamashita, Yannick Plomteux, Nobuko Gaine, Naomi Tokuda, Maiko Itani, Suresh Kukde, Madeleine Newman, Joey Chang, Jennifer Luvanda

Altar Guild supporters: Anita Gesling, April Morito, Kako Kinoshita

AV TEAM - Technology Lead - Jonathan Oh, Coordinating Lead - Ayumi Ito

We are happy to serve the people of God at Tokyo Union Church, supporting the in-person and online worship experiences. We are seeing continued growth and improvements in the AV team, particularly in developing the confidence of our team members, and we are seeing more creative productions and improvement in our operations. In addition to our team improvements, we have undergone a huge redevelopment of our production workflow with the new VMix production system, giving us incredible flexibility and simplicity in operations. Through continued training and fellowship gatherings, we hope that the AV team is a fun and creative group that enjoys glorifying God by serving the TUC community. We continue to ask for your prayers and support and welcome new members to join the team!

Here are the team members who served during the 2023 year: (AV) Joey Chang, Chien Hsu, Ayumi Ito, Jimu, Risa Kikura, Ren Kubo, Isaac Lee, Maddy Newman, Jonathan Oh, Rance del Rosario, Brad Schmidt, Matt Ushida, Remi Yamazaki (Livestream Hosting) Nee Lam, Jonathan Oh, Vanessa Sihite

#### FLOWER GUILD - Akiko Adachi, Leader

Flowers were displayed weekly in the sanctuary with special flowers on Christmas and Easter. Active members of the flower guild are Pastor Hector, Tomoko Sakurai, Chika Eto, Hisae Iwasaki, Naomi Kanaiwa and Akiko Adachi.

#### SANCTUARY CHOIR- Yuka Omi, Director

The Sanctuary Choir serves regularly in worship from September to July.

In the current schedule, the choir sings at 8:30 and 11:00 on the 1st Sunday of the month, and 11:00 on the 3rd 4th 5th Sundays. We also sing at Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday services. On Good Friday, a small group from SC sang Crucifixus.

In 2023, we resumed in person Choir Sundays which was stopped during the covid pandemic.. In June, we presented selections of faith and hope from the work of contemporary American composer Dan Forrest. In December, we presented part 1 of the Messiah by Handel.

We are grateful to have some new members.

#### UNION PRAISE TEAM - Remi Yamazaki, Director

UPT maintains the core mission of prayerful contemporary/gospel praise and worship and last year saw significant changes in leadership and structure.

Prior co-music directors Lorene and Madoka with co-leader Brad built a strong, diverse group with a focus not only on music but also on spiritual health, prayer and community. Lorene stepped out into other ministries, and UPT had a wonderful time together at the Manse to thank her for her service. Remi stepped in as music director in September 2023 and was able to build off of this foundation. Apart from increased gospel repertoire and new musicians/soloists, the biggest changes have been structural. New structures include a digital log of repertoire/arrangements and policies, closer collaboration with Pastors, and audition-based membership. In addition, UPT is officially open to non-Christians (with support structures in place to help non-Christian members understand song meanings). This makes UPT both a minister and a ministry.

UPT/AV collaboration has been especially close due to overlapping membership of the respective group leaders, (Remi and Ayumi), as well as several other members. This collaboration will continue to deepen with joint audio trainings/rehearsals as technical requirements for UPT increase.

By God's grace, UPT continues to grow in membership, musicality and repertoire. One unexpected change is the growing involvement of children in UPT. UPT is officially open to ages 13 and up, but four children of UPT members under this age have also joined. Next steps for UPT will be to prayerfully decide how to move forward with this wonderful gift, and to continue to set up infrastructures for prayer and spiritual health appropriate for the growing number of members.

#### USHER TEAM - Sam Donkor, Leader

The year 2023, started in a happy way. A team of 30 members but with few who are active.

All team members were strong and healthy. Ushering was smooth till the middle of the year.

From there things changed and it was difficult to get ushers. I called on my young son to assist me and he has been a regular usher and an inspiration to the team. Although it was not easy, the few who were

helping were very dedicated.

I am grateful to the entire usher team and to the following members who served regularly and often: Larry Mojumdar, Arai Tazuko, Theo Bannor, Maki Yamamoto, Mike and Atsuko Tsunashima, Becky and Toshihiro Agatsuma, Jody Fuller

A dedicated member of the team, Winnie Langelaar, returned to her country of Canada after a long stay in Japan.

It will interest you to know that although we are few, the team is strong and will always be there for the church. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. (John 3:17)

TAIZE WORSHIP (Leader - Nancy Pierson-Umezu)

Taizé-style worship services were a regular part of Sunday worship on the 4th Sunday of each month through April 2023. While we no longer use Taizé on Sunday morning, we continue to have Taizé services for Lent, Advent, and other special times. We thank Nancy Pierson-Umezu, coordinator and singer for Taizé worship, and all the singers and instrumental musicians who support this special worship service. We also thank Pastor Steve for his active role as singer and guitarist.

## 04. Personnel Ministry Team

**by Alison Harada**

**How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?**

God has blessed Tokyo Union Church with dedicated and talented staff who work hard to support and further TUC's mission to God's glory. We are grateful to all of our staff, from the Pastors to the office staff to the ministry staff to the facilities manager to the musicians to the nursery workers. It is a privilege for the Personnel Ministry Team to support them in their work.

**List the activities and the engagement of your ministry this past year.**

PMT serves as the "HR Dept" for TUC, handling contracts, hiring, evaluations and career development for our beloved staff.

## 05. Finance Ministry Team

**by Francois Keet and Alan Sorba**





### **How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?**

We are a dedicated group of TUC members who care about our church building, the pastor's homes, and in church property. We joyfully serve together each working with the gifts and talents God has given them. We are open to all members and gladly welcome volunteers who want to serve and enjoy fellowship together. We are grateful that God always provide people and funding.

### **List the activities and the engagement of your ministry this past year.**

#### MAINTENANCE

- Building Maintenance (Repair of basement toilet, Sanctuary Electrical work, Replacements lighting bulbs, Change the batteries in the faucets, Managing Dehumidifiers, Other minor work that cannot be outsourced) - Manse Maintenance (Tree maintenance, Maintenance of Airconditioning unit)
- Replacement of Manse Washer - Organ Maintenance SAFETY AT TUC -Emergency evacuation drills were held after the 8:30 and 11:00 Sunday worship services on September 24, 2023.
- All inner stairways and outside emergency exits are periodically checked for safe and efficient exit.
- We are grateful for the expertise and work of Natali Reton who made regular reviews and updates to all emergency supplies and and restocked all First Aid Kits.
- Thanks go to Byron Walker who worked with Natali Reton to review safety procedures and emergency rations and supplies for the Sunday school.

## 06. Outreach Ministry Team

by Devon Arthurson & Nancy Pierson

## **May to December 2023**

St. Alban's Deeper Service Ministry - 240,000 yen  
ARI (50th anniversary) - 500,000 yen  
DWB (Ukraine and Libya Emergency Relief) - 250,000 yen  
Lutheran Relief (Gaza Emergency Relief) - 100,000 yen  
TEC Christmas Concert to Doctors Without Borders - 177,500 yen  
JOEE - 300,000 yen  
Bott - 140,000 (private donation)

## **Christmas Offering 2023**

Budo no Ki - 217,097 yen  
Lutheran World Relief - 217,097 yen  
Ishikawa Earthquake Relief January 2024 Uchinada Bible Church (Ishikawa prefecture) - 100,000 yen  
World Vision Japan - 100,000 yen  
Second Harvest Japan - 100,000 yen

## **February to March 2024**

Ember Kenya Grandparents Empowerment Project - 2,000 USD  
NPO KRAIANY - Association of Friendship Japan-Ukraine - 100,000 yen  
Doctors Without Borders - 200,000 yen  
Ishikawa Earthquake Relief from the Congregation March 2024 Noto Help - 100,000 yen  
World Vision - 278,650 yen  
Second Harvest - 278,650 yen  
TELL - 200,000 yen

## **Moments for Ministry**

World Vision  
St. Alban's Deeper Service Ministry  
Asian Rural Institute  
JOEE  
Budo no Ki  
Doctors Without Borders  
TUC members who volunteered with Noto Help.

# 07. Children, Youth, Family

Youth and Children

**by Byron Walker**





I am thrilled to share with you the incredible journey of our Children and Youth Ministries over the past year. It has been a time of remarkable growth, deepening relationships, and inspiring moments that have truly enriched our community.

One of the most exciting developments has been the transformation of our Sunday School classes into vibrant, spiritually enriching experiences. Our dedicated teachers have poured their hearts into offering lessons in each of our classrooms that not only teach the fundamentals of our faith but also encourage our young members to explore their beliefs in meaningful ways, all rooted in the Bible and an affirmation of each and every child of our church as beloved. The feedback we have received from both parents and children has been overwhelmingly positive, affirming the impact these classes are having on our youth.

In addition to our Sunday School classes, we have introduced a variety of new and innovative events that have captured the imagination of our community. From the heartwarming Christmas play, to deep and open teen hangout times, from the insightful confirmation class, to the joyous Christmas party, creative Good News of Kids offerings, a bilingual story book "シ ㄏ < ㄆ < Blessing" for kids, and not forgetting the incredibly successful Vacation Bible School over the summer "Kids of the Bible" – each event has brought us closer together and strengthened our bond as a church family.

Looking ahead, we are filled with excitement and anticipation for the future of our ministries. We are

committed to continuing to provide a welcoming and nurturing environment where our youth can explore their faith, ask questions, and grow into the individuals that God has called them to be.

As we embark on this new chapter, let us be reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:14, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." May we continue to nurture and support our children and youth, knowing that they are an integral part of God's kingdom and the future of our church.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported our Children and Youth Ministries over my short year here. Your dedication, passion, and love have made all the difference, and I am excited to see where this journey takes us next.

## Young Adults Group

### **by Sarah Dusek**

We have been blessed with many new active YAG members this year.

YAG is a fellowship of young adults ranging from college students to young professionals in their 20s to 30s. Whether new to faith or seasoned church-goers, we all find ourselves here at TUC, wondering, *What is my purpose? Who am I? How do I live a good life?*

How YAG can best serve this transient, diverse group of people became the focus of this year's fall retreat. We decided to involve YAG members in facilitation and planning, creating the YAG Committee.

We established the roles of:

- *Chairperson*, who facilitates YAG committee meetings and makes sure events are on track.
- *Treasurer*, who manages the YAG budget.
- *Secretary*, who keeps record of monthly meetings and member birthdays.
- *Service* who serves as liaison between YAG and church outreach, communicating service opportunities to YAG members.
- *Bible Study Leader* who finds curriculum for and facilitates weekly Bible study.

The planning that goes into YAG is by no means limited to this group, all are encouraged to participate in our monthly meetings and share their ideas for events. Without such involvement, YAG would not have evolved into what it is now today.

Our Activities this year:

- Summer YAG BBQ Kickoff Party
- *Summer at the Movies* discussion series lead by Audrey Thorne
- Hanabi viewing
- Fall Retreat: *Moving Forward*
- Fall Feast potluck
- NOOMA discussion series lead by Sarah Dusek
- Christmas with Pastor Steve at the Mannes

- Christmas Party with Budo no Ki
- Christmas party at an orphanage with JOEE
- Bible Study: The book of Samuel lead by Sophie Wang
- Spring Retreat: *Recalibrate*

## 08. Community Life

**by Admin Team**

As Tokyo Union Church continues to build upon a legacy of community and faith, the year 2023 has been one of profound appreciation and recognition for the often-overlooked contributions that sustain our church's spirit and operations.

Throughout the year, we spotlighted the dedicated efforts of individuals and teams whose service often goes unseen but is essential to the vitality of our church community. Bianca and her diligent team have continued to grace us with warm fellowship and nourishing sustenance during our cherished Coffee Hour. Each week, they prepare, serve, and clean up with a spirit of generosity that enriches our gatherings.

Our Finance Ministry Team has adeptly managed the church's resources, ensuring that our fiscal responsibilities are met with integrity and prudence. Their careful stewardship allows us to allocate resources effectively and supports our mission and outreach programs, ensuring that our impact extends beyond our walls.

We are reminded of the truth that each role in our church, visible or not, is critical to our mission. It is in these acts of unseen service that we see the beauty of our community, woven together by the threads of dedication and love.

We are immensely grateful to every member of our church family whose contributions make our community a beacon of faith in Tokyo. Let us continue to support and appreciate one another, recognizing the invaluable service of those who serve so faithfully behind the scenes. Together, we uphold the vibrant tapestry of Tokyo Union Church, guided by love and committed to the ministry that glorifies Christ.

## 09. Nominating Team

**By April Morito**

**Elders: Andy Chen, April Morito**

**Members: Mary Aso, Russell Gesling, Maya Tatsuno, Pastor Steve Yamaguchi, and Pastor Hector Herrera**

Matthew 20: 25 – 28

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the ruler of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

1 Timothy 3: 2

*Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. Not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.*

Titus 1:6-8

*An Elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable. One who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy messages as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

The Nominating Team

We give thanks to the Lord for His gracious guidance and wisdom. We have strongly felt the Lord's guiding hand throughout this year. It has, indeed, been a very full and busy year for nominating, kicking off with a Pastor Search team, the regular slate of elders (with additional ministry positions and changes in ministry profiles), Shukyo Hojin members, finding members-at-large to serve on Nominating , we currently face the start of 2024 with the charge to put together the Associate Pastor Search Committee.

Pastor Search Committee

One of the first tasks of Nominating this year was to put together a Pastor Search Committee. The committee did a wonderful job of searching, praying, and discerning who the Lord has called to lead TUC. We give thanks to the Pastor Search Committee, which is comprised of Jackie Militello, committee chair, Josephine Alade, Damon Bratcher who returned to the US, Curtis Jordan, Jody Fuller, Naomi Kanaiwa, Mitsuhiro Umezu, Remi Yamasaki, and the President, Catherine Sasanuma, serving as an ex-officio member. This team of dedicated people was approved in the special congregational meeting in October to begin the search for our new Senior Pastor.

Slate of Elders

Having spent quite a number of meetings to put together the Pastor Search Committee, the team focused next on filling in positions of elders to serve on council. Through retreats and special sessions, Council reflected on the needs of the church and implemented changes in the By-laws and

the makeup of council. Nominating looked at the different portfolios of each ministry team and filled the positions for a new ministry team that is the Property & Technology Ministry.

We thank the following administrators and elders who have accepted the Lord's call to lead the church in the coming year and who were elected by the congregation at the Congregational Meeting on February 4th:

Catherine Sasanuma (President), Brad Schimdt(VicePresident), Ji Mu (Clerk), Vanessa Sihite (Children and Youth Discipleship) Ikuko Omori, (Property and Technology Ministry Team), Martha Gomez (Community Life), Andy Chen (Worship and Music), Peter Mathies (Spiritual Formation). We were not able to fill the position of Treasurer.

We also thank the following elders continuing their two-year term: Alison Harada (Personnel Management), Francoise Keets (Finance), April Morito (Nominating).

### Shukyo Hojin

The following persons have agreed to serve as members of Shukyo Hojin, the legal body of the church: Mary Foster, Jody Fuller, Alison Harada, Rika Nakajima, Ikuko Omori, and Junko Takahashi.

### Elders & Members Transition

There have been quite a few Elders this year who are stepping down from their positions after having given so much of their time, experience and leadership serving in council. We thank you all: Andy Chen (Nominating), Jodi Fuller (Worship and Music), Eiji Hoshii (Personnel) Isaac Lee (Clerk), Rika Nakajima (Vice President), Brad Schmidt (Evangelism), Alan Sorba (Treasurer), Michiko Yaegashi (Spiritual Formation) and stepping down from serving in Shukyo Hojin: Kathy Matui-Koll and Larry Mojumdar.

The Nominating Team would also like to thank Suresh Kukde for his dedicated participation and invaluable input during his term as member at large. The team also welcomed Maya Tatsuno as a new member at large. She comes with a depth of discernment and a deep love for TUC. Mary Aso, who has been a dedicated member and a blessing in keeping us organized, is also due to rotate off as member at large this year. Lastly, we welcome Yuka Shigeno as a new Nominating team member at large for 2024.

### Associate Pastor Search

Nominating starts off 2024 with the task of putting together an Associate Pastor Search Team who will be responsible for finding a new Associate Pastor to work alongside Pastor Hector and Council. We look forward to presenting the nominees of the Associate Pastor Search team to the congregation for approval.

## 10. Evangelism Ministry Team



by Brad Schmidt



**How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?**

Gave us a clear vision for what Evangelism should do and a core team who shared the vision. ABC ballet's ministry with both dancers and parents shows God at work in the Arts ministry.

**Please list the activities of your ministry this past year.**

Provide specifics on the events, attendance, and happenings that occurred over the year. The purpose is to give the congregation a quick sense of TUC's activities this year.

Creation of Bible study to follow Alpha - Getting Answers to Hard Questions Getting the Welcome to TUC Desk situated in the coffee hour room where people who want information on various activities can come. We have set up a data-base of activities, and with close coordination to the church calendar can get people plugged in and feeling involved and wanted.

Arts Ministry:

March 2023 - Messiah & Swan Lake to a full house

November 2023 - Velmenni with 130 participants.



December 2023 - Christmas Ballet was to an extremely full house!

Families are the major emphasis of outreach so we are very friendly towards families and offer a multi-lingual service to them. There is special seating for families with children in the balcony. After the performance, the audience - especially the children - are invited to take pictures with the dancers. The leaders of the Arts Ministry, Rio Mitani and Christian Martinu, also lead bi-lingual Bible studies in English and Japanese and help new Christians for their baptism preparation. Rio and Kanehira Mitani also offer a simultaneous translation of the Pastor's sermon into Japanese via LINE.

# 11. Spiritual Formation

by Michiko Yaegashi

## How have you seen God at work in your ministry over the year?

Adult Education

Sermon Lab - The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the text of the scriptures and the voices of one another. God uses our diverse religious experiences and backgrounds. The diversity is sometimes what makes the conversation so interesting. Some people enjoy engaging in questions and conversations. Some people simply come to listen which is also fine. No one has to say anything - but everybody is very welcome to speak if they want. The Spirit prompts and provokes thinking on the text before the sermon, which some people greatly enjoy.

Group Lectio Divina with Pastor Steve - God speaks to us as we listen to the Bible text quietly and prayerfully. We ponder and mull over the text, like a cow chews its cud. It is a quiet activity, but there are moments when people can share what they are hearing, if they wish. Some are silent throughout the whole time and that is fine. We listen carefully for God's invitations to us and sharing these is sometimes a highlight of our time together. People experience a calm and peaceful centering for the day. Anyone can come and just sit in and listen for God's voice. Newcomers are always welcome.

Pastoral Investigations - The bible study class went through The Historical Jesus, Apocalyptic Literature: Enoch, Faith and Science and most recently two Lenten Series.

Reading & Praying The Psalms - Through reading and praying and through sharing our thoughts and reflections, we have learned to delve deeper into the presence of God's voice in the scriptures and our lives. We have also managed to create a community where people feel free to share their "ups and downs" on the spiritual journey.

TUC Friends Bible Study - This group started when several people, after a meeting at TUC, began talking and expressed an interest in learning more about spiritual warfare. God moved in their hearts to start a Bible study and He has been at work in the group by helping them to grow in their faith and

understanding of God's word. Also, their prayers are always uplifting and it's been a wonderful experience for them to pray together to God. In addition, they felt God's presence in the group through their fellowship as well.

## Spiritual Life

The Prayer & Healing Ministry – We saw God at work when we heard reports of God's answers to prayers for healing, help and guidance, etc. in the feedback from the people we prayed for. Also, while preparing for the P&H Services, we felt God working in the center when the necessary wisdom, words, people, and works were given. In addition, we saw God at work when we talked in pairs about our mutual needs during the counseling practice session at the Counseling First Aid Workshop. As it was a very blessed workshop, we felt God's presence.

The Prayer Chain - The power of the Holy Spirit is felt as the prayer requests are sent out, knowing that each member of the prayer chain will be praying. Many people have thanked us for our prayers and there have been a significant number of praise reports.

Wednesday Prayer Group - We see God at work in the passion and perseverance of the members who have continually prayers over the years.

## **List the activities and the engagement of your ministry this past year.**

### Adult Education

1. Sermon Lab - A weekly Bible study that meets every evening at 6:30 PM on Tuesdays. They dig deeper into the Bible verses that will be preached on Sunday with the preacher. Everyone is welcome to ask questions, listen to other perspectives, and grow deeper in faith and understanding of the Holy text.
2. Group Lectio Divina with Pastor Steve - A time to spend listening to the Bible—slowly, quietly, attentively. Each Thursday morning at 8 am gather with Pastor Steve to listen to God's word for the day. All comers are welcome.
3. Pastoral Investigations – A weekly study that will take place on Zoom every Wednesday at 12:00 pm with Pastor Hector. The study will wrestle with classic and modern texts from the Christian tradition. Everyone is invited to eat lunch and join the study during lunch break.
4. Reading & Praying The Psalms – Having completed a six-month process of reading the Gospel of John in the style of St. Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, we have returned to reading the psalms in the same style.
5. TUC Friends Bible Study – A weekly study that meets every Wednesday at 9pm with a facilitator, Lorene Clemens. They used Pastor David Jeremiah's sermon series on Spiritual Warfare, listening to the Word preached and discussing what they learned. After completing that series, they started using a new one called "A Life Beyond Amazing" which challenges them to make nine important decisions that will transform their hearts, lives and the world. Besides studying, they enjoy events like hiking, meals and a Christmas party. Their friendship and faith continue to grow!

## Spiritual Life

1. The Prayer & Healing Ministry - Each Sunday, two members of the Prayer and Healing Ministry Team pray with those who request prayer after the 11:00 a.m. service. We also have a Prayer & Healing Worship Service twice a year, in the spring and fall. This service focuses on prayer and healing, having time for everyone to pray together. In addition, last May, we organized a Counseling First Aid Workshop and invited Dr. Joe Ozawa, who is a pastor and psychologist, to lead it. There were a large number of participants and we all learned, through his lectures and practice sessions, that in counseling it is important to listen and pray with love.
2. The Prayer Chain - The prayer requests are now posted on the prayer chain as soon as they are received, which makes the whole process easier to manage and timely. Sometimes when someone sends a prayer request through our website, saying they are interested in coming to the church, I contact the pastors about it and then they can contact the person. Also, through the prayer chain, we are able to keep in touch with current as well as past members.
3. Wednesday Prayer Group - This prayer group prayed using email on alternate Wednesdays (two or three times a month), bringing before God prayers and requests relating to TUC's Pastors, ministries, and members, as well as the society and the world at large.

# 12. Leaders and Staff

## **Council**

### Pastors and Officers

Steve Yamaguchi, Pastor  
Hector Herrera, Associate Pastor  
Catherine Sasanuma, President  
Rika Nakajima, Vice-President  
Alan Sorba, Treasurer  
Isaac Lee, Clerk

### Elders

Francois Keet, Finance  
Andy Chen, Nominating  
April Morito, Nominating  
Jody Fuller, Worship & Music  
Eiji Hoshi, Personnel  
Alison Harada, Personnel  
Brad Schmidt, Evangelism  
Vanessa Sihite, Youth Discipleship  
Michiko Yaegashi, Spiritual Formation

## **Staff**

Byron Walker, Youth and Children Director  
Drix Apigio, Facilities Manager  
Audrey Thorne, Pastoral Assistant  
Larissa Soares, Children's Director  
M. Angel Catalá, Youth Director | Facilities Manager  
Megumi Naito, Office Administrator  
Kats Mikami, Accounting  
Yuka Omi, Choir Director  
Miwako Horii, Organist  
Takako Hanabusa, Organist

## **Shukyo Hojin**

Kathy Matsui-Koll  
Larry Mojumdar  
Mary Foster  
Jody Fuller  
Rika Nakajima  
Ikuko Omori

## **TUC Foundation, Inc.**

John Mullins, Chairman  
Russell Gesling, Vice Chairman  
Brock McMunn, Secretary  
Joseph Dunkle, Treasurer