**Senior Minister’s 2023 Annual Report**

**Rev. Dr. Nicholas Hood, III**

2023 was a significant year in the life of our church. For me, this year has represented the end of a three-year pandemic. The church resumed in-person worship in April of this year for the 8:30 a.m. service only, with a mask mandate for all in attendance. After a few weeks, the Church council voted to adopt a mask-optional policy. Throughout the entire pandemic experience, the 8:30 a.m. worship service has been and still is streamed live on FaceBook, YouTube, and the church website.

I continue to be fascinated with the online response to our worship services. During the height of the pandemic, the number of views was often between two thousand to four-thousand-six hundred persons on Facebook. The YouTube views have hovered around one-hundred fifty per Sunday. I do not have independent numbers for persons viewing the worship services on the church website. Often, towards the end of 2023, the number of views on Facebook seems to have settled between one thousand five hundred persons and over five hundred fifty –thousand plus views as of last Sunday.

As of the first Sunday in November, the church has raised $771,000 in total giving which, includes the current expense and mission fund, and over $100,000 for the Air Chiller Campaign, which is part of the capital budget. In my opinion, this is phenomenal, considering we are not back to 100% attendance at our worship services. Many of our members and friends of the church are supporting the church via online donations through the church website and direct mail-in contributions. We also have a substantial amount of members who donate via automatic donations.

On September 17, 2023, the church returned to 11 a.m. worship. Attendance has been slow but steady. The thought has often crossed my mind that the church membership needs to re-acclimate itself to 11 a.m. worship. Several members have told me throughout the pandemic that they miss the 11 a.m. worship. I believe the 11 a.m. worship service is important for us to resume for several reasons.

1. Parents of young children have told me that the only time that makes sense for them is if worship is at 11 a.m. because they want their children in Sunday School, and it’s just more difficult to have their children ready for church before the 11 o’clock service.

2. There is a substantial number of members who simply do not want to worship at 8:30 a.m. or any time earlier than 11 a.m.

3. A substantial part of our congregation lives over twenty-eight miles from the church, and I believe that over the long run, the 11 a.m. worship service time will be more attractive to this group of people.

4. Historically, the 11 a.m. worship service has provided the largest financial contributions to the church each Sunday. Church Council has had much dialogue about possibly changing the time of worship, and I believe this is all well-intentioned, but I also believe it is short-sighted for the reasons above. I very much would like to continue rebuilding the 11 a.m. worship service, which was the larger attended service at our church historically before the pandemic. The bylaws for our church specifically state that worship service shall be at 8:30 and 11 a.m. unless changed by a vote of the congregation. I am mentioning this today because there has been some talk about changing the time of worship. I believe this is not the right point to change our time of worship. If 11 a.m. attendance continues to be slow into next year, it may be a more appropriate time to make that change. I need your help in rebuilding both our 8:30 and 11 a.m. worship services. Please feel free to contact me directly at 313-999-4492 if you have any suggestions.

As we move towards the end of 2023, I would like to share several points of reflection for your consideration.

* **Church local mission opportunities are returning.** The Free Food Distribution Ministry has continued every Sunday throughout the pandemic and continues currently. A group of roughly Fifteen church members and others volunteer to pick up, receive, arrange, and distribute food each Sunday to approximately sixty persons. In my opinion, this is one of the most dynamic ministries at the church, and I commend each of the individuals involved, including Ameena Taylor, as chair. I also want to thank Naice Bell for assisting with the Free Food Ministry from her home.

This December, the Christmas gift-giving program will focus on the children of the Plymouth Educational Center, where Dr. Celia Thomas is the Board Chairperson, Redic Grant, Dr. Deirdre Shelton Young, Deierdre Weir, and myself are members of the Board of Directors. The new principal, Dr. Derrick Harrison, his wife, Amber, and their son, Dylan, have become members of the church. Kendra Cook has volunteered to chair the Christmas gift distribution program, succeeding Evelyn Hudson Wright, who has been Chair of this program for the last several years. We are hoping to be able to supply at least two hundred children with gifts this Christmas.

* **The Sunday School has resumed in-person classes.**

I want to thank Victoria Barnes and Joyce Penn for coordinating the Sunday School throughout the pandemic virtually, with classes broadcasted via Zoom. This summer, we began to slowly faze in in-person Sunday School with several outdoor gatherings. Currently, the Sunday School is utilizing offices on the upper level of the church. I would also like to thank Satyra Johnson, Nicole Grant, William Brooks, and James Hall for their leadership as Sunday School teachers.

* **Confirmation of Faith Class.**

In January 2023, I began a ten-week Confirmation of Faith Class held at my home every Sunday. The persons who were confirmed into membership were:

Kristian Hudson

Lawrence Hudson III

John McLean

Landon Wilkerson

The purpose of the Confirmation of Faith Class is to instruct youth twelve years or older on the beliefs, governance, missions, and history of our church. The resumption of this class was another major step towards returning our church to normalcy. Each of the young persons who were confirmed delivered a speech in front of the congregation on Maundy Thursday and during our Easter worship service.

* **Efforts to establish a college-age discussion and contact ministry.** On Sunday, November 12, 2023, I sat down with seven college students, five of whom are members of our church that are enrolled at Wayne State University and Oakland University, to discuss the topic of my sermon for the day Finding, Knowing, and Building Your Purpose. This group was convened by one of our young members, Micah Grant, who on the first Sunday we returned to 11 a.m. worship, invited several of her line sisters from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority to worship with her in church. In speaking with Micah following the service, I asked her to consider inviting her line sisters again, but the next time, we would meet after church with a light lunch and talk about the sermon for that day. I am excited about the possibility of creating a dynamic college student ministry at the church.
* **All of the church boards are continuing to meet.**

Many thanks to Ashanti Bell Patterson for her leadership as Moderator, Dr. Celia Thomas for her leadership of the Deacon Board, Carrie Wright for her leadership in the Board for Christian Education, and Leslynn Angel for her leadership of the Trustee Board. Each of these Boards continues to meet virtually via Zoom technology. Although Zoom is a newer technology, it has improved the attendance of our church meetings.

* **The music department has suffered a great deal during the pandemic and is now in the process of rebuilding.**

The Sunday before resuming 11 a.m. worship, our Minister of Music, Lamar Willis, informed me that he had a personal situation that I should be aware of. When I learned of the gravity of his situation, I contacted the church lawyer, Darwyn Fair, and requested a recommendation he recommended, and I agreed with him that the Minister of Music should be placed on leave of absence with pay until the situation was resolved completely. The Trustee Board subsequently voted unanimously to conclude the compensation for the Minister of Music on October 25, 2023, because the Minister of Music has not been able to provide a clear date when his situation will be resolved. I regard this as a major setback to our music program because I was personally depending on the return of our Minister of Music and all of our Choirs. Since the Minister of Music has directed and accompanied each of our Choral Ensembles, we are now in the process of finding musicians who can play and direct during this interim period. Some progress has been made, but it has been difficult to locate musicians who are available to play for both 8:30 and 11 a.m. worship services.

* During the first year of the pandemic, there were only ten persons who helped without an audience. Those individuals included five musicians and five others who assisted with our live streaming. I believe that years from now, history will be kind to those who helped our church to thrive without the benefit of a live congregation to experience worship service together. The following individuals are the persons I recognized with a small plaque in September for helping our church to return and function through the pandemic when it was prohibited to worship in person.

Jabari Anderson Video Ministry

Trish Ashburn Ushers

Steve Bostic Media Ministry

Kathy Carrington Ushers

Jerome Clark Musician

George Cohen, Jr. Reader of the Statement of Faith

Mamie Cokley Ushers

Mike Daniels Media Ministry

Dr. Ella Davis Reader of the Statement of Faith

Willie Golston Ushers

Winnie Golston Ushers

Peggy Higdon Ushers

Evelyn Hudson Wright Media Ministry

Zion Ingram Scripture Reader

Chris Jackson Treasurer

Jason Johnson Musician

Josiah Johnson Scripture Reader

Joshua Johnson Scripture Reader

Ibrahim Jones Musician

Barbara Leslie Ushers

Nicholas McGuire Media Ministry/Scripture Reader

Jason McGuire Media Ministry/Scripture Reader

James Miller Media Ministry

Shelia Oden Musician

Clifford Rockefeller Trustee Chair

Marcus Skinner Musician

Madison Washington Scripture Reader

Dr. Oronde White Video Ministry

Rita White, Esq. Video Ministry

Lamar Willis Musician

Janae Woolfolk Assistant Trustee Chair

Carrie Wright Scripture Reader

Chloe Wright Scripture Reader

* **Status of the Lower Level.**

The lower level was destroyed by a sewage backup on June 25, 2021. Initial remediation of the lower level began immediately following the sewage backup. Our current status is that we have filed a 1.5-million-dollar lawsuit against the Philadelphia Insurance Company in Federal Court. The Church is represented by a Law Firm Fabian, Sklar, King & Liss, P.C. The Law Firm has taken our case on a contingency basis because they believe the insurance claim of the church is valid and very strong. At this time, the case is before Judge Judith Levy.
Our legal representation is moving for a summary disposition, which means asking the Judge to rule on the case before it even goes to trial. It is my understanding that at some point, the church will probably be offered to settle with the Insurance Company. Currently, this year, the church has received a $577,000 2% loan from the Small Business Administration. This loan can be used to underwrite valid expenditures specifically related to the restoration of the lower level from the sewage backup. I expect that renovations to the lower level will hopefully begin in 2024.

* **Church Capital Project Assessments.**

I would like to thank the Property Maintenance Committee, the Trustee Board, and Sonya Pouncy for her facilitation in creating a capital project budget. This is the first comprehensive capital project budget the church has developed in several years. I would also like to commend the Chair of the Property Maintenance Committee, Dr. Oronde White, and Board members Cynthia Ross, Esq., Brenda Tidwell, and Gregory Whiting. The 2024 budget represents the start of addressing the capital needs of the church. I anticipate a major capital campaign to take place in 2024. Although we will be unable to accomplish all the goals on the list in 2024, next year will be a great start. The capital projects budget is included in the Annual Report for this year.

* **Weekly broadcast on The Word Network.**

In January of 2023, I began a weekly thirty-minute broadcast on the Word Network. The format consists of a fifteen-minute sermon, followed by an interview that I host primarily with Medical doctors, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, a Professor, and a few Ministers, where I ask them to share their insights regarding the sermon I preached. The guests I interviewed in 2023 include Psychiatrists Dr. Gina Orton and Dr. Linda Hotchkiss. Psychologists Dr. Krystle Woods Hollier, Dr. Ural Hill, and Dr. George Fleming. Medical Doctors Dr. Oronde White, Dr. Andrea Coleman, Dr. Bobbi Edwards, Dr. Zewditu Asfaw, and Dr. Ingida Asfaw. Professor, Dr. Elizabeth Asfaw. And Clergy, including Rev. David NunnTelfort, Rev. Candice NunnTelfort, Rev. Ian Streaker, and Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews. I chose the Word Network for this program because, for years, I have sought a format that persons I have met during several mission projects at our church around the world, including the Interior of Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guatemala, South Africa, Egypt, Fiji, and Israel would be able to stay abreast of what I am doing. This broadcast is entirely funded through a Non-Profit, called the Nicholas Hood, III Ministries.

* I would like to thank the staff who faithfully serve our church, Regina Yopp, Administrative Assistant and Church Secretary, LaTasha Washington, Logistics Manager and Assistant Secretary, Henrietta Carson, retired accountant who now serves on a part-time basis, Steve Hicks, Custodian and Landscaper, and James Miller, General Assistant.
* **Persons who joined the church in 2023.**

Melvin Hooten

William Hunter

Calvin Mason

Bobbie Jones

Kennetta Simmons

Meeta Martin

Doretha Stubbs

* **Members that passed away in 2023.**

Marjorie Bryant

Nathaniel Warren

Dr. Dennis Woods

Janice Malone

Gail Page Grange

Marguerite Sykes

Louise White

Rev. Lee Brown

Terri Tabor Conerway