

15 YEARS OF HIGHLANDS CHURCH

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

highlands church

BETTER TOGETHER

For 15 years, Highlands Church has pursued a more just and generous expression of Christianity in Denver and beyond.

It's been an incredible journey. Fueled by our shared passion and love for this mission, we've thrived through 15 years of constant change and rebirth.

This annual report is a celebration of our collective journey over the past year. It's a testament to the beauty and transformation we've witnessed within our walls and throughout our community.

As you turn each page, we invite you to reflect on the life we've shared together and celebrate the resilience and joy that defines our church.

Thank you for being an essential part of the Highlands Church story.

Here's to the our next chapter!

BRETT BUSSEN

COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR





Our Mission

**DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS,
WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD**

Our Vision

**EVERYBODY KNOWS
AND EXPERIENCES THE
RIDICULOUS LOVE OF GOD**

Our Purpose

**CREATE BELONGING BY
AFFIRMING THE SACRED
DIGNITY OF ALL PEOPLE
AND INSPIRING THEM TO
DO THE NEXT LOVING THING**

OUR ETHOS

Married, divorced and single here,
it's one family that mingles here.

Conservative and liberal here,
we've all gotta give a little here.

Big and small here,
there's room for us all here.

Doubt and believe here,
we all can receive here.

LGBTQ and straight here,
there's no hate here.

Non-binary, woman and man here,
everyone can here.

Whatever your race here,
for all of us grace here.

In imitation of the ridiculous love
Almighty God has
for each of us
and all of us,
let us live and love without labels!

WORSHIP

Sunday Worship is an incredible time of community, great food, excellent music, and challenging, thoughtful sermons that invite our imagination and activation for justice!

This year we had the privilege of hosting Dr. Peter Choi as he led us through Five Shifts in Deconstruction Theology. And we had the most fun engaging our creativity and spirituality with the Art + Faith summer series!

We painted, visited museums and the Botanic Gardens, wrote a collaborative poem, and even played a Dungeons & Dragons-like game!

9 PREACHERS ON OUR TEAM

28 WORSHIP TEAM MUSCIANS

14 A/V TEAM MEMBERS

38 STUDENTS LED YOUTH SUNDAY



BELONGING

It's in community where the relational rubber meets the road.

Relationship with others is how we grow in generosity, grace, forgiveness, and healing.

In the summer of 2023, a group of folks aged 55+ began gathering monthly and led the way as we pulled resources together to respond to the Venezuelan refugee crisis happening in Denver.

More than 100 Highlanders joined a **Deepen Group**, meeting regularly for four months to forge deeper relationships.

We showed up for parties and art nights, making connections with new and old friends. It's in these places that we can find belonging, and help others know that they belong, too.

13 DEEPEN GROUPS IN FALL 2023 AND SPRING 2024
WITH MORE THAN 100 PARTICIPANTS

6 BRICKHOUSE CLASSES FOR
LEARNING AND CONNECTION

84 POUNDS OF
COFFEE SERVED

750 FRESH BAKED
BISCUTS SERVED



YOUTH

Our youth had a year full of education, adventures, and community! **Snow Camp** headed to camp to get away from the noise of the city and connect with God in a new way. It's amazing what happens on a retreat as students discover, ground, and strengthen, their own beliefs.

The **Dry Bones Vision Trip** took our older student through Elevations, a unique experience that combines the heights of adventure and contemplation in the wilderness with dynamic depths in the city. The trips are designed to be inspiring, educational, fun and uniquely spiritual.

We hosted a **O.W.L. (Our Whole Lives)** weekend where 7-12 graders focus on pro-social and proactive goals of helping them become healthy people who feel good about their bodies, remain healthy, and build positive, equitable loving relationships.

30+

STUDENT EVENTS ATTENDED
OUTSIDE CHURCH (GAMES,
PLAYS, DINNERS, ETC.)

39

STUDENTS
ATTENDED CAMPS

10,000

REMINDER TEXTS SENT TO KIDS



KIDS

Our children and youth experienced faith in fun and engaging ways this year! Our first-ever **Vacation Bible School (VBS)** was a resounding success, with 27 children and 36 dedicated adult and middle school volunteers coming together for five days of learning, creativity, and Bible exploration.

Every fourth Sunday, our **Kids Worship** program fills the room with joyful energy as 30 children and 6 volunteers sing, dance, and celebrate God's love.

Through our "Dig In" curriculum, dozens of volunteers provide monthly support, helping our young people feel connected to Jesus and experience the unconditional love of God.

We also hosted a variety of special events, including **Easter Egg Hunts, Trunk or Treat, and Youth Sunday.**



7,000

SQUARE FEET OF SPACE
DOWNSTAIRS FOR KIDS
AND TEENS

1ST EVER

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL
PROGRAM

1000+

EASTER EGGS FULL OF GOODIES

“

Kids Ministry is special because how we approach God's love for us and everyone creates a unique perspective which allows us to encourage our kids to question, doubt, believe and hope. We pray our kids grow up loving others and knowing they are loved by God.”

- Jolene Funkhouser, Kids Coordinator

OUTREACH

Justice and worship are inseparable. God reminds us throughout the Bible that working for justice is not optional for people of faith - it's at the very heart of worship.

"God's justice is the restoration of the sacred dignity of all people," writes womanist author Kelly Brown Douglas.

With every worship song, every dollar given away, every minute volunteering, and every glitter blessing, we are actively assuring the sacred dignity of people, with special attention to those for whom our unjust systems are stripping dignity away.



Our community donated car loads of suitcases, underwear, and other necessities in partnership with Denver Friends Church for Venezuelan Refugees



We joined Broomfield UMC to serve volunteer worship leaders in Ecuador, offering friendship, encouragement, and learned from each other.



29 volunteers marched in the Denver PRIDE Parade and offered a smile + glitter blessings at our booth, shared with Trinity UMC, Sixth Ave UCC, and Denver Community Church.

FINANCE

In recent years, Highlands Church has navigated numerous transitions, alongside a nationwide trend of decreased church attendance.

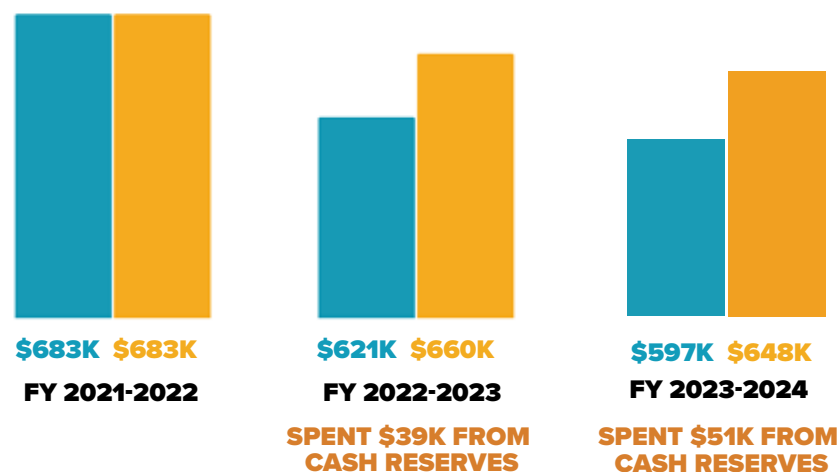
We continue to address these shifting financial realities with careful stewardship, proactively aligning our expenses with income adjustments to ensure responsible resource allocation.

Thanks to prudent financial management, we maintain healthy cash reserves. This financial stability allows us to continue investing strategically in both our facilities and ministry programs, while simultaneously providing a safety net for the future.

We are blessed by the supplemental income generated through valued partnerships, including our ongoing collaboration with B'nai Havurah. Additionally, income generated from renting our facilities to outside vendors provides another valuable revenue stream.

Highlands Church remains committed to financial transparency and accountability as we steward the resources entrusted to us.

INCOME VS EXPENSES



\$643,706 IN CASH RESERVES

AS OF JULY 1, 2024

\$653K

APPROVED BUDGET FOR FY 2023-2024
JULY 2023 - JULY 2024



GIVING

Highlands Church is more than just a building; it's a vibrant community, and you are a vital part of it. Every time we gather, learn, and serve, it's because of your generosity. When you give to Highlands Church, you're investing in something bigger than yourself. You're helping to create a place where people connect with God, grow in their faith, and find a sense of belonging.

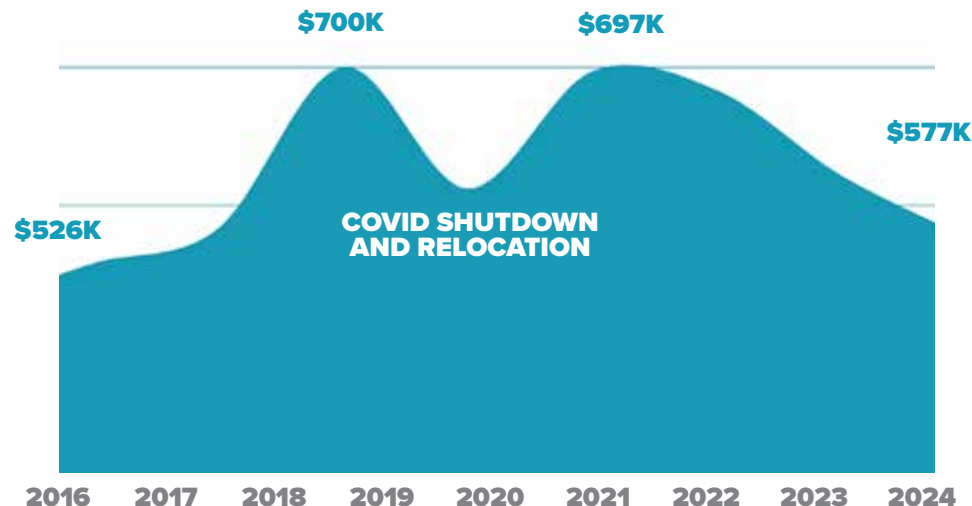
Our Sustaining Partners understand this. They've committed to giving regularly, and their generosity provides a solid foundation for everything we do. It allows us to plan for the future with confidence and dream big about the ways we can serve God and our community.

We've been careful with our resources and have healthy savings. But as we look ahead, we see even more opportunities to grow and deepen our impact.

A modest increase in giving this year would mean we can strengthen and balance our budget, enabling us to invest more directly into our ministries.

Every gift, no matter the size, truly makes a difference. Thank you for being a part of our community and investing in the future of Highlands Church.

INCOME FROM GIVING (2015-2024)



READY TO START OR INCREASE YOUR GIFT?

Here are the five most common monthly gifts for new Sustaining Partners alongside recommended options for increasing your current gift this year.

CURRENT/NEW MONTHLY GIFT	10% INCREASE	25% INCREASE
\$25	\$28	\$32
\$50	\$55	\$63
\$100	\$110	\$125
\$250	\$275	\$313
\$500	\$550	\$625

Start or update your Sustaining Partner gift today:

HCHURCHDENVER.COM/GIVE

GOODBYE FOR NOW

A note from former Co-Pastor Jenny Morgan:

It's time to say goodbye.

But the dream still goes on and on.

I am retired now and saying goodbye to my vocation at our beloved church. But I will care for the world around us in new ways.

My next season of life will take me and my family on some amazing adventures. But I will never forget our life together as a church. I carry with me all the good and all the love I received as a result of being with you for 15 years. I can hardly wait to hear about the new adventures Highlands Church will embark on together.

Highlands Church will go on and on far into the future! We still have much to learn and much to offer our fractured world. We've spent these years together pursuing a big, audacious dream!

The dream is becoming a reality: the love of God freely given by God to everyone!

As we invite more people into this love that will not let us go, together we affirm the sacred dignity of all people.

The investment of love my partner and I have cultivated as Sustaining Partners at Highlands Church will also go on and on, supporting our church into the future. We see ourselves as life-long Highlanders!

Highlands is such a life-giving, relationally-rich, safe community of faith. I feel proud to have played a role in our spiritual growth and leadership, and in the fun we've shared over the years. And I feel proud to have walked with Christ and with you during the first 15 years of the dream that is Highlands Church.

Keep walking on the heels of Jesus! I will too.

Bursting with love and gratitude,

Jenny



WHAT'S NEXT?

Fifteen years ago, we started Highlands Church with the foundation theology of affirming the sacred dignity of LGBTQ souls, with no caveats or ulterior motives.

We were following the inclusion of Jesus, focused on a community of people who had not just been left out, but ostracized and damaged by the church.

For fifteen years, we have seen how liberating this practice of inclusion has been - not only for LGBTQ folx, but for straight allies as well.

Our transformation as a community has increased our awareness of injustice in so many systems and attitudes, particularly for People of Color.

Today, we understand that we cannot separate one marginalized identity from another. We recognize that we are only whole when all are liberated, flourishing, and thriving.

We are, fundamentally, a community that seeks to affirm the sacred dignity of all people.

Where sacred dignity is being stripped away from people, we will work to restore it.

Sunday worship is so much more than just "going to church." We are being formed by the one who came to show us our sacred worth. And then we get to show up - at our kids' schools, at the ballot box, on the streets, at work - to offer a taste of that sacred worth, liberation, to people who desperately need it.

What we are doing is revolutionary - we are part of Jesus' revolution to show God's love to absolutely everyone. Our transformation in spiritual formation is wrapped up in this work to love God and love others.

So what's next? **More of this. More liberation. More worship that breathes life into our souls and calls us to breathe life into others.**

We hope you will be a part of this because the world needs you - we need you, too.

RACHAEL MCCLAIR
CO-PASTOR

GARETH UNRUH
CO-PASTOR



highlands church

1700 South Grant Street
Denver, CO 80210