



Unitarian Church in Charleston

2023 Annual Report

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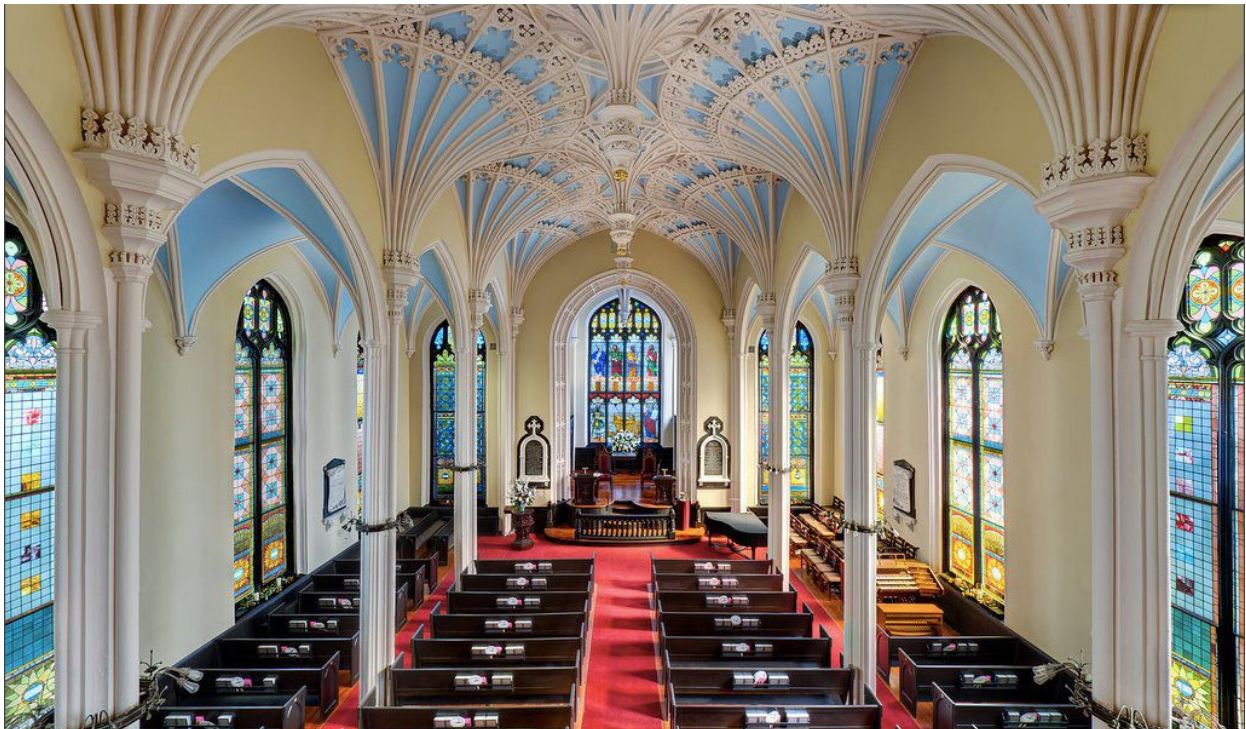
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Unitarian Church in Charleston

2022-2023

“The Unitarian Church in Charleston is an inclusive community of inspiration, love, and service committed to creating a better world.”

Vestry Board

Chair: Bill Walsh ('20-'23)

Vice-Chair: Diane Boyer ('21-'24)

Secretary: Rotating

Treasurer: Suzanne Hardie

Bob Egelson ('20-'24)

Kathleen King ('21-'23)

Connie Hayes ('22-'25)

Hillary Hutchinson ('20-'23)

Allison Sterrett-Krause ('22-'25)

Steve Wilson ('22-'25)

Minister:

Rev. Rebecca Hinds (*Ex-Officio, Non-Voting Vestry Board Member*)

Community Minister:

Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley

Staff:

Executive Director: Sandra Selvitelli (*Ex-Officio, Non-Voting Vestry Board Member*)

Music Director: Ryan Pagels

Director of Community & Faith Development:

Danielle Lopez

Communications Manager: Regina Ruopoli

Finance Manager & Human Resource Specialist:

Christine Magnarella Ray

Facilities: Willart Smith



Milestones

In Memorium

Jerry Huhn (2/23/47 - 9/30/22)
Trudy Drummond Muegel (3/28/36 - 10/12/22)
Joyce Pendleton (8/4/23 - 12/29/22)
Mary Hodgkin (11/7/45 - 5/17/22)
Tony Mignone (3/4/58 - 3/22/23)
Suzanna van der Woude (5/1/30 - 6/4/23)

Weddings

08/20/2022 Susie Robinson & Brandon Klar
09/10/2022 Jessica Moore & Leo Mathers
10/28/2022 Maddison Chauvin & Shea McSween
11/18/2022 Teresa Butler & Paul Evanivich
11/19/2022 Erica Hattings & Jon Coleman
04/15/2023 Asha Smith & Juan Dawson
04/22/2023 Alexa Ryzinski & Joshua Teti
04/29/2023 Jamie Figueiredo & Preston Hall

2022-2023 At a Glance:

Membership: 370
Friends: 23
New Members: 18
Deceased Members: 4
Archived Members: 43
Pledge Units: 214





Vestry Board Chair Letter

I would like to take a moment to share some thoughts with you, both at the Board level and within our Church. The Board's focus has shifted from the day-to-day operations of the church, such as counting gravel in the parking lot, towards a greater emphasis on financial oversight and understanding our purpose and reason for existence. We have been working diligently to establish clear guidelines and ensure that we live by them, as they serve as the compass for our collective efforts.

I would like to take a moment to celebrate the many accomplishments of our congregation. We have created vibrant and lively services filled with uplifting music, joyous expressions, profound reverence, and a deep spiritual connection. Our programs and outreach initiatives have been diverse and far-reaching, making a positive impact on our community. Through our dedicated efforts in social justice, we have left an indelible mark, contributing to a better and more equitable world. Moreover, our strong and stable finances have provided a solid foundation for our continued growth and impact. In the face of a turbulent world, our congregation stands tall, resilient, and thriving.

However, amidst our celebration, let us remember that our journey does not end here. We must remain steadfast and committed to our mission. To ensure transparency and fairness, we conducted surveys and personally witnessed the dedication of our staff. Additionally, we have established fair compensation and benefits, valuing their contributions to our shared vision.

Our financial policies and committee, led by Suzanne and Steve, have worked diligently to create a Finance Review Team. This team, having completed its first review, has implemented robust controls and responsible spending practices, ensuring our resources are allocated effectively. Monthly spending controls and regular reviews at the Vestry Board have become integral parts of our financial stewardship. Furthermore, we prioritize the safety of our congregation by conducting thorough reviews and maintaining strict compliance with safety policies.

We have developed a comprehensive emergency plan for situations when the minister is absent, guaranteeing that our spiritual needs continue to be met. Regular reporting to the Board provides transparency and ensures that our collective efforts remain aligned with our goals.

I want to thank our dedicated team comprised of Board members, staff, and congregation volunteers who reworked our Constitution to align with Policy Governance and I want to highlight the crucial work being done by members of the Board to strengthen the connection between our congregation and the Church as a whole. The insights gleaned from our Congregational Survey have revealed our desire to be a multifaceted church, seeking to create positive change in the world while fostering joy, spirituality, and deep connections within our community. We understand the importance of ensuring that every individual feels comfortable and welcomed within our church walls.

Submitted by Bill Walsh, Vestry Board Chair

2022-23

Minister's Letter



Dear Members and Friends:

Congratulations! We have successfully completed our first year of Policy Governance with all the policies and procedures we need in place! The Vestry Board has had their Governance Policies up and running all year long, the staff and I have been diligently updating our Operating Procedures, and, as of May 2023, the congregation has adopted a newly revised Church Constitution which aligns with all of the above.

With all of these pieces in place I truly believe we are poised to make a bigger impact than ever before. We know who we are and what difference we want to make in the world. In other words, we are clear on what *ends* we are trying to achieve.

This is great news for me, because a significant part of my job as your minister is to advance our ends in the world. In turn, the Vestry Board holds me accountable to this work. This accountability process includes the board directly asking the congregation how we are doing in an annual church-wide survey, as well as an annual report from me with my own assessment and conclusions. The Board received a report from me in May and I would like to share some of it with you here. Here is a brief excerpt:

"My goal is to provide the board with a deeper understanding of whether the church is realizing its ends. But measuring impact, as we all know, is profoundly difficult. What I will provide here will not tell us all we need to know about whether we've had the impact the ends envision. But I believe in the value of imperfect measures that tee up critical questions and reflections. I will include several of those questions in this document. As the questions deepen, so will our potential impact.

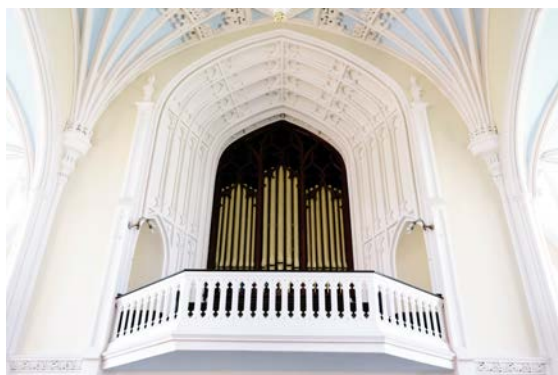
(Note: As this is my inaugural report on Ends, I have spent a considerable amount of time on theological interpretations and left out the data for now. I will be looking at the recent board survey for data and will present that at a later date.)

Mission: The Mission of the Unitarian Church in Charleston has been clearly articulated by the congregation: "We are a community of inspiration, love, and service committed to creating a better world."

Values: However, the congregation has not formally adopted a set of distinct core Values. Without this core common understanding, I am looking at the use of inspiration, love, and service in the mission statement and understand them to be our core values. In addition, I am relying on traditional, historic UU values including reason, freedom of thought, peace, truth, and justice. If these are not the core values of the congregation, I will need the Vestry Board to determine what they are and further articulate them for me.

The interpretation and monitoring of the following sub policies (Ends) fully interprets and monitors this overarching policy (Mission and Values). (Continued on pages 7-8)

In faith,
Rev. Rebecca Hinds
Minister



Ends Interpretation

1. A community of love, integrity, and inspiration;

Interpretation:

The Beloved Community is always aspirational. It requires generosity of spirit, loving kindness, accountability in our relationships with one another, and deep humility. Love is more than tolerance and the simple absence of conflict; it is the presence of true justice grounded in compassion. Integrity exists when our values and our actions as a people align. It includes a willingness to address conflict thoughtfully and directly, and the desire to stay in relationship even when we disagree. Inspiration is experienced in connection with the holy (that which is beyond the self) in a way that helps people make meaning in their lives, access creativity, and take action in the world.

2. A spiritual home that accepts others and welcomes everyone of good will;

Interpretation:

A spiritual home is a place where everyone is warmly welcomed, experiences belonging, and is encouraged to grow. What binds a spiritual community together is not social justice, politics, or social activities, but a deep, religious identity as Unitarian Universalists.

Welcoming others begins when we recognize our own identities, assumptions, and biases, and approach everyone with curiosity, compassion, and a heart truly open to friendship and connection.

Moving from initial welcome into truly accepting others asks us to confront systems of oppression, disrupt white privilege and fragility, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ageism, and build bridges across differences.

It shall be determined that a person is of good will if they resonate with our congregation's core values, respect our mission as a valuable, meaningful way to express themselves in the world, and conduct themselves in a friendly, cooperative manner.

3. A church that supports its members in spiritual practices that nurture reverence, connection and joy;

Interpretation:

A spiritual practice is anything done with intention and devotion. It requires repetition and long-term commitment. Both personal spiritual practice and congregational worship (our shared, communal spiritual practice) are essential expectations of church involvement. They ground us in our relationship to the holy and the interdependent web of life, expand our capacity for wonder, and foster spiritual development.

As practitioners, we will develop spiritual maturity and find ourselves more connected (to the holy, one another, and the true self), and spiritually grounded with an increasing capacity to be in awe and connect with the deep joy available in life, even in a world filled with woe.

contd.

Ends Interpretation contd.

4. A leader and partner in achieving social justice;

Interpretation:

We encourage and challenge ourselves and one another to live out our faith in the world with a personal and collective commitment to social justice. We invite the power of this commitment, deepened by our spiritual practices, to change our hearts and lives and help guide our justice work. We will find our place, personally and congregationally, within the wider justice seeking community, leading when called for, but more often than not partnering with those most directly impacted by oppression and following their lead.

5. An attractive and vibrant spiritual home that retains current and new membership;

Interpretation:

An attractive and vibrant congregation is one in which its members are eager to testify about the church in their personal lives and willing to invite a friend to worship or another church activity.

A church that retains current and new members has a clear pathway for people to follow from visitor to new member, to active or engaged member, to church leader.

Retention also involves members seeing themselves as disciples of our faith, on the path to spiritual maturity, experiencing personal transformation and spiritual growth directly because of their participation in church life and the valuable friendship and fellowship they experience.

6. A community where people are actively engaged in church life;

Interpretation:

People do not come to church to join committees or teams or to give us their money. They come spiritually weary and seeking solace, spiritual care, friendship, and purpose in life. As such, engagement in church life must be overall a positive, life-giving, and energizing experience that connects people with the holy, others, and their core self.

Active engagement in church life begins with an invitation. As we welcome new members and grow as a community, people will need a clear doorway into engagement with distinct opportunities to connect, volunteer, and lead. This involves paying regular attention to team leadership structures and systems, what is working, and what may need to shift or be released to create space for others to engage.

7. A church that has the human and financial resources to fulfill our mission.

Interpretation:

Beloved Community and generosity (grounded in a shared theology of abundance) are both at the heart of our UU faith. On the path to Beloved Community, we will exercise a generosity of spirit wherein people freely and joyfully participate in church life and share their financial resources with the church as a way to advance our mission and make it real in the world.

As a people, we hold the church in trust and steward its resources as an expression of the promises we make to each other and the world.

Rev. Rebecca Hinds, Minister



Membership

People seek out a church home for connection and growth. The first time visiting a new church can be both exciting and intimidating. I am thrilled when I look around on a Sunday morning and see current members happily welcoming potential future members. It is a whole church process and our kindness matters. Those first few connections lead the visitor to the pathway of membership through New to UU classes, Membership Lunch and Learn, and coffee with Rev. Rebecca and me.

On another note of connection, we owe a great deal of gratitude to our wonderful Caring Team. Through love and consideration, the Caring Team worked together to ensure members who needed care received it with open hearts. I am excited to rebuild our Membership team with a wonderful group of people who will actively engage in the welcoming and membership process to ensure new and current members are connected to the life of the church in meaningful ways.

Submitted by Danielle Lopez



4 New to UU Classes Offered



14 Ministry Teams



18 New Members



375 Book of Life Entries



8 Community Building Activities



7 Attended the UUA General Assembly



\$753 Raised for the Minister's Discretionary Fund on Christmas Eve



Worship

Hybrid, or multi-platform, worship is here to stay! This year, even though we were able to worship in person in the sanctuary all year long (with masking optional), we continued to livestream all services. Preserving this virtual option has been a lifesaver for those among us who live farther away, who may be ill, who lack transportation, or who, for whatever reason, may prefer to join us online on Sunday mornings.

I want to thank all of our dedicated worship associates, musicians, volunteers, and staff for helping me produce such high quality, meaningful worship this year. It was a team effort!

Submitted by Rev. Rebecca Hinds



150 Average Sunday Attendance



4 Special Services (*2 Christmas Eve & 2 Easter*)



50 Average Virtual Attendance



3 Off-Site Services (*Friendsgiving, May Day, & Park Circle Pride*)



2 AV Techs



3 Dancers (*Stewardship Kickoff & Easter*)



35 Greeters



1 Welcome Back Breakfast



7 Worship Associates



1 Easter Egg Hunt



5 Sunday Stewards



3 Thank You Receptions (*Auction, Cantata, & Alliance*)



Music

Looking back, it's incredible to realize just how many volunteers we've had participate in the choir this year- on average we had about 15 for services where the choir was present! The choir also prepared 4 large services- the Winter Cantata, Christmas Eve, Easter, and the Flower Ceremony. We didn't have too many special concerts, but a big factor was that much of our music budget was used during the transitional period between Music Directors. We did host a few special concerts, and will be ramping up the 2nd Sunday concerts in the 2023/24 season!

Submitted by Ryan Pagels



1 New Music Director



30 Choir Members



4 Special Concerts



4 Special Choir Performances



1 Million Musical Memories Made



21 Guest Musicians



2 Drum Circles





Religious Education

This year, with Rev. Rebecca's blessing, I reimagined Religious Education and decided it would be a year of fun and connection. And guess what? It worked! Through the help of dedicated volunteers and excited families, we spend our short time together on Sunday mornings getting creative and having fun. Under the direction of Regina Ruopoli, we introduced a monthly music program for all ages and it was a great success. In the classroom we experimented with new projects including an "Egg Drop Challenge" and building a Rube Goldberg machine. Through this reimagining, I witnessed blossoming friendships, lots of laughter, and some very serious teamwork.

Outside of Sunday mornings, I witnessed the same connections happening through entire families during our Family Circle events. It brings me so much joy to see parents connect over a new recipe, a common hobby, a silly game, or even a parenting challenge. I hope to see this family community continue to grow and thrive in the future.



41 Kids Sunday Mornings



36 Family Circle Participants



7 High School Graduates

Looking Ahead...

As we move forward, I am excited to partner with Planned Parenthood to offer comprehensive sexual education while we work to rebuild the Our Whole Lives program. Sunday mornings will continue to be a time for connection for specific age cohorts and thoughtful programming centered around our Unitarian Universalist faith. We will continue to offer Family Circle and other opportunities for multigenerational connection as we continue to grow together.

Submitted by Danielle Lopez

Religious Education Memories





Social Justice



8 Coffeehouse Concerts with over
\$4000 raised for Mitchell Elementary School



14 Organizations received Share the Plate funds
with over **\$9000** raised



5 Social Justice Educational Events



5 Social Justice Advocacy Events



5 Social Justice Service Projects



3 \$5000 Mini-Grants received by
local non-profits raising **\$15,000**



\$2000 Donated to the South Carolina UU
Justice Alliance (SCUUJA)

contd.



Social Justice



\$6000 Donated to the Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM)



7 CAJM Team Leads



144 CAJM Members



146 People attended the CAJM Nehemiah Action



1 Refugee Family sponsored



2 Parades (Emancipation Day and Pride)



35 People volunteered with Backpack Buddies



1 Earth Day Worship Service and Festival



2 Period Packing Parties

contd.



Social Justice *contd.*

Looking Back...

It was a fabulous year for Social Justice! We got our Coffeehouse Concerts back up and running post-Covid, we prioritized educating ourselves and others on racial justice, we continued our deep and longstanding partnership with CAJM to advocate for change in the Charleston Area, we were a visible presence in the community for LGBTQ rights, we found new and improved ways to care for the earth through our actions right here on our campus, and we were able to donate a considerable amount of money to local non-profits and social justice related causes.

We continue to have a strong Social Justice program that we will be building upon in the year ahead as we find more, better ways to increase our impact in the wider community.



Looking Ahead....

In the last month of the 2022-23 fiscal year, the Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley has begun a one-year consulting social justice ministry with the Unitarian Church in Charleston.

Drawing upon his long experience in social justice ministry and building upon his roles as a Community Minister and as Executive Director of the South Carolina UU Justice Alliance, he will examine social justice ministry in this congregation and develop recommendations to deepen the congregation's social justice work, develop social justice leadership, increase congregational involvement, center voices impacted by injustice, improve welcoming, and increase impact of our social justice initiatives.

Looking to current programs, discussions with members, local community resources, and wider UU resources, Rev. Nathan will provide quarterly reports and a year-end plan next May. Members are welcome to reach out to Rev. Nathan as we work together to build on our current social justice programs and fulfill more deeply the commitment to justice in the church's mission and ends.

Finances

We close out our 2022-23 church year with our finances in good shape and under budget. Our income, including our stewardship season, was strong and our expenses were in check. As a reminder, our main sources of income are members' pledges (70% of the budget), plate collection, docent tours, contracted rentals (apartment, parking, and ghost tours), building rentals (weddings and events), fundraising and investment earnings (interest and gains on donated stock sales). Our largest expense is personnel (68% vs 75% average of other UU churches) and we are proud to use the guidelines offered by the UUA to offer fair and equitable salaries and benefits to our employees. This data is sourced based on our geographic area and allows us to promote equity, transparency, and economic justice from within. We should all be very proud that we can produce such excellence.

Our budget is sound and offers healthy reserves for campus management and emergency funding. We also are very pleased to have conducted our first internal financial review using our policies and procedures with great success! A huge thank you to all of our volunteers and staff who worked with docents, the auction, stewardship, event management and internal reviews.

95% Stewardship goal of \$425,000 reached

\$3,000 Raised from countless docent tours

Over \$28,000 Raised in Sanctuary rentals

\$35,000 Raised from our Auctions

Over \$100,000 Raised in Gage Hall Rentals

Almost \$5,000 Raised by the Alliance

5 Community organizations assisted by the Alliance

Alliance Purchased our new Christmas tree and assisted with funding the new pew cushions

Endowment Investment Board

At May 31, the EIB members and the expiration of their terms were Clarence Manning, Chair (2025), Richard Hayes, Adjutant (2024), William Finn (2025), John Jamrogowicz (2024) and Fred Himmelein (2023). As his term was up, Fred Himmelein rotated off the Board and was not replaced, as the Church Constitution adopted at the Annual Meeting on May 31 reduced the size of the EIB to four members elected by the congregation and one member appointed by the Vestry Board from among its membership. That appointment had not been made as of May 31.

At May 31, the value of Endowment Fund assets was \$1,243,950, compared to \$1,198,081 at January 1. Assets at fiscal year-end consisted of US stocks (\$624,869), non-US stocks (\$304,045), bonds (\$249,395), and cash and other (\$65,641). All investment securities are held in diversified mutual funds of high rating. A substantial majority of our Endowment Fund assets are held in ESG-type investments that we believe align with our Unitarian Universalist values and the mission and principles of the Church. (It must be stated that ESG classification is imprecise and based on criteria and measurements subject to substantial disagreement among investment professionals. This segment of investment “science” is evolving.)

Over the course of the year, the EIB approved rebalancing of the portfolio to better position the assets for recovery of value after the significant downturn in the market over the past year, to provide for value protection of investments during debt ceiling negotiations and to reduce equity exposure in the portfolio to approximately 75%, a level deemed by the EIB to be more prudent.

During the fiscal year, an aggregate of \$1,023.75 of legal expenses was incurred and paid in connection with bequests from Will Moredock’s estate; and \$4,037 was distributed from earnings on the music designated assets, \$6,221 from earnings on the churchyard designated assets, \$9,614 from earnings on the social justice designated assets and \$48,819 from earnings on the undesignated assets.

The Protected Principal is the amount of inflation-adjusted principal from which no distributions can be made without congregational approval. At December 31, 2022 (the date Protected Principal is calculated for purpose of determining possible fiscal year 2023 distributions), Protected Principal was calculated at \$1,240,721.

Distributions can only be made during fiscal year 2023 to the extent the value of assets in the Endowment Fund exceeds \$1,240,721.

Professional Advisor. John Warren is taking a leave of absence this year from his duties as ex officio member of the EIB, therefore, he has proposed and Vestry has approved that his absence be filled by Charles (“Bucky”) Knowlton, Jr., Sr. Vice President/Financial Advisor, Private Wealth Manager, with Robert W. Baird & Co. Incorporated.

EIB Policies and Practices. The EIB approved an amendment to its Policies and Practices providing for greater reporting to the Vestry Board and the congregation, including presentation to the Church membership twice annually at a time and place designated by the Vestry Board. At this forum, members of the congregation would have the opportunity to comment and raise questions.

Submitted by Ren Manning, EIB Chair













UNITARIAN CHURCH
IN CHARLESTON

Est. 1772

The Unitarian Church in Charleston is an inclusive community of inspiration, love, and service committed to creating a better world. We seek to inspire, love and serve with open faith, open hearts and open minds! We're active in the struggle for racial equality, gender equality, sexual orientation equality, civil liberty, religious freedom and peace. We're the oldest UU congregation in the South, and the second oldest church in downtown Charleston, SC.

For more than two hundred years, The Unitarian Church in Charleston has welcomed those seekers of meaning and purpose who are not satisfied to search alone. We gather, not because we have found all the answers, but because we wish to question together.

All are invited to join us for Sunday services at 11 a.m.





Unitarian Church in Charleston

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Charleston, SC 29401
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