

## USH Board Meeting - February 21, 2018

Present: Sherry Manetta, Stephanie Briggs, Chris Wilt, Hank Murray, Judy Sullivan (had to leave at 8:00), Hank Murray, Joe Rubin, and Phil Gardner; Heather Rion-Starr and Cathy Rion-Starr, ex officio

Guests: Rayla Baldwin-Mattson, Joan Nicholl-Senft, Tom Gervais, Carolyn Carlson, David Newton, Janice Newton

Sherry called the meeting to order at 6:32

Opening Words - Judy Sullivan - Poem by Martha Kirby Capo

6:33 - J Rubin read the Board Covenant

6:35 - changes? CRS requested to move safe congregations to right after the RE discussion. HM asked to discuss training he attended at UUSE

Thank yous - Virginia DeLima, Rick Tsukada, Rev. Erica, Kayla Costenoble, and Esther McKone

6:36 Consent Agenda - Sarah M clarified changes to minutes, Phil Gardner moved to approve, Joe Rubin seconded

Ayes - 8

Nays - 0

Abstentions - 0

Motion passes

6:37 RE Presentation

Rayla's Summary is attached

Joe R - What (in Rayla's mind) is the most important thing for the Board to focus on? Rayla - would like to focus on potentially expanding on the UU specific programs, like COA and OWL & spending time on Youth Group development to keep continuity for the kids, and to also have more involvement with the youth group over at the Fern St church. Joe R - what can Board do to help? Rayla - more hours for her, and some hours for someone to organize the Youth Group. When John B decided not to continue, the \$ left from that was moved to more hrs for Rayla, some to fund OWL/COA, some for Sara Cassiby to be RE assistant.

Joe asked if board should add a pitch for stewardship gatherings for RE volunteers - tabled until Stewardship discussion

Sherry - may be another council fair in spring - more RE info available there

7:36 Safe Congregations

(Safe Congregations Summary is attached)

Safe Congregation committee was formed to research and draft an official policy primarily to protect the congregation from sexually inappropriate behavior. Committee needs new members

(especially a male, since there are currently none on the committee), one of whom should be a Board Member. Committee is Board appointed, not volunteer. Policy should be put in place to try to take a preventative stance, rather than being in a reactive position. Draft policy is almost ready to be brought to the board. If there is a board member interested in volunteering, check in with Rev. Cathy.

7:48 Financials - Phil G - bottom line looks good as of the end of December. Rental Income is currently low (ambitious goal in budget), but Rev Heather is optimistic that we will get closer to the budgeted amount than we currently are. It might help if there's a brochure available for Rentals. There may be someone in the congregation who can help with putting together a brochure to use for rentals.

B&G has 2 line items in budget: general maintenance (always in flux, because things need to be fixed/replaced as they break) they have gone over budget by a significant amount for multiple years, Board/Finance needs to be realistic about budgeting. There's also an amount funded from the endowment for small projects.

Sherry and Joe looked at pledges, and have decided to hold off on calling members who are behind, and will revisit it in April.

8:00 - Stewardship

Reviewed Joe's talking points for Board Members to use at the stewardship gatherings, maybe add a little bit more detail regarding how the budget breaks down in regards to membership #s. Joe will make a couple of additions and changes to the talking points and will send them around At event

- Brochure

- Fair share guidelines

- Pledge card

Rev Cathy pointed out that we're trying something new this year, and things will go well and things will go wrong. It's all a learning experience.

8:22 - Sabbatical plan

Letter from Revs is attached

The current proposed plan is for Rev. Cathy and Rev. Heather to take Q4 2019 as a joint sabbatical, with a plan for how to cover ministerial duties in their absence to be in place by Oct 2018. Congregation has not had a minister here long-term enough to take a sabbatical in >15 years.

8:30 Stephanie presented Intern Minister proposal:

Intern Minister Discernment Report is attached

Discussion regarding cost, enthusiasm in congregation, scheduling,

Hank moved that we hire intern and apply for funding from UUA, commit to minimum annual amount in order to apply for UUA matching grant. Phil seconded (Judy S. was absent for this vote)

Aye - 7

Nay - 0

Abstain - 0

Motion passes

8:51 - Sherry - any additional business? Heather re: minister's report - she is gone for 2 Sundays in March to attend installation of settled minister in Bend, OR & to attend a workshop at Rowe. Sherry - Ellie Revill's memorial service is March 10 at 11am. Heather - Meeting House Presents concert is looking very interesting! Joe - we owe the congregation a follow-up from the semi-annual meeting. Sarah will post the notes taken from the post-its along with the January Meeting minutes.

8:57 Stephanie read closing words from Albert Einstein.

8:58 meeting adjourned

Respectfully Submitted,  
Sarah McKenzie, Secretary

## Consent Agenda

USH Board meeting February 21, 2018

1. **January board minutes:** Approve January board minutes

## 2017-2018 RE/DRE Update

Rayla D. Mattson, 2/16/18

The last 5 ½ years of working here at USH has been amazing. Not to say that there hasn't been up's and down's as those are a plenty; But, since I began, the program has continued to grow and flourish and I have continued to grow and flourish as well. I am contracted to work 23.75 hours. My average hours worked is 28.

**Staff** – Sarah Cassidy is in her second year as RE Assistant. She currently works two Sundays a month from 9:00AM-12:00noon. She mainly covers the Sundays I have off and the weeks where we have one-room class so she can be the second adult in the room. This works well on the weeks she is here but it is not enough time to accomplish anything additional such as weekly class room set-up, admin support and an additional face of RE for families.

The nursery currently has 6 nursery workers that rotate Sundays. They also work evenings and special events as needed. Twice a month they work extended nursery hours from 10:00AM-2:00PM. This allows for parents to attend meetings and other events after service. The remaining Sundays they work from 10:00-12:00noon to cover the worship hour, set-up and clean up. We added the extended nursery hours about 2 years ago. It is used regularly and is much appreciated by our families. It also helps sub-councils, discussions and the like to plan if they want families with children to attend.

It would be nice to have one or two paid teacher staff. Just to provide some consistency and not have the scramble each Sunday when I'm short on volunteers.

**Volunteers** – We currently have about 20 volunteers rotating in the classrooms. This is still not enough teachers and assistants to cover each week of classes on a rotating basis. I am constantly looking for new volunteers to fill in gaps and many weeks I just don't have the volunteers needed. Some of the 20 also include people who volunteer only once or twice a year for things like Easter.

I would love to have a larger base of volunteers. Especially those that are dedicated and committed to the program. I have loss most of my dedicated volunteers; mainly through burn out and unfortunately illness and death. I would like to build that number up so I don't feel like I'm holding the program on my own.

**Nursery** –We have seen growth in our nursery program over the last several years. In part due to growth in members and visitors and in part to members and staff having babies! We recently had a doorway installed between the new nursery and the old one. This will allow us to still keep acceptable ratios while also allowing us to separate our non-walkers with our walkers/runners. We are hoping in install Dutch doors to illuminate the tripping hazards that the baby gates currently pose.

**Prek-2<sup>nd</sup>** – This group is working on a curriculum called *Chalice Children*. Some of the lessons involved helping them become better acquainted with the building and what we do here as well as looking at some beloved UU rituals and traditions.

**3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>** - This grade group is working on Harry Potter themed curriculum. The basic premise is that they are fighting horcruxes or ills in the world. They are addressing issues such as poverty, hunger and child labor. This

year the focus for them is on social justice. In the past they have worked on how to look outside of themselves and this year they are putting that into action. They have already collected canned goods, books and toys.

**Middle School** – This group is our strongest group. Many have gone through RE together since the Pre-2<sup>nd</sup> grade program. Several went through Coming of Age last year and are going through Our Whole Lives together this year. They feel the most connected to USH and to one another. They are also the group most likely to come or not come based on other members in the group. They loving sometimes refer to themselves as “the herd” or “the pack”. They are the group of kids who move through the building as a unit!

They are doing a dual curriculum this year. Part of the year focuses on “Creativity” and the other on “The Simpsons”. We ended the “Creativity” piece early as they were not enjoying it and jumped in “the Simpsons”. This leaves us with about four weeks at the end of the program year with nothing curriculum scheduled. There is not plan currently for these four weeks.

**Curriculum** – This year I chose to use curriculum that USH has used in the past. Since I started, I have been rotating from things we have in the building. The exception to that is the 3-5 class which is using a new curriculum I purchased and the summer programs. When I started RE was not meeting in the summers and we began summer RE in 2013. I have either purchased or written the curriculums we have used.

Ideally moving forward, we would use some newer curriculum that the UUA and other sources have available. There are some great programs out there. The challenge I have is in finding the time to research what would be a good fit and then adapting them. Most lessons are set for 1-2 hours. When I get them, I need to go through each lesson to modify them to fit into our time schedule. Right now I don’t have to time to do that for all our classes so I use what we already have. Some of which just isn’t working any more.

I would also like to add some type of curriculum to our nursery since that program is growing. Currently the only thing we plan for those students is a circle time with a story.

**OWL (Our Whole Lives, Sexuality Education Program)** – There are currently nine students going through OWL this year. Seven of the nine are from USH. Four of the participants went through Coming of Age (COA) last year. There are two facilitators; one from our congregation, Margalie Belizaire, and the other from a UCC congregation, Elliot Altomare.

The program began in October and will run through June. They meet most Friday nights at USH.

I would like to continue alternating yearly between COA and OWL. Next year would be COA for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders with the following year being OWL for 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders. There has been great interest not only from the current students but from the ones coming up as they look forward to these two UU rites of passage.

As for the students themselves, they are an amazing group. They’re thoughtful and engaged with their questions. They have strong values. And they are consistently angry that people judge other people for their gender or sexuality.

**Youth Group** – This group is being led by co-leaders Nina Elgo and Rob Spector along with 2 other adults providing additional support on soup Sundays and on weeks where the main leaders are away. There are 8 youth actively participating in the program. They enjoy the activities and we get very good participation and engagement, particularly offsite hiking, overnights and soup-making.

The group is currently preparing for their end of the year service. At this point, it appears that the theme will be about social media; because they understand it better than the rest of us, they are best positioned to do a deep dive into what it means and how it has affected us as a society - the good, bad and the ugly. We have asked them to look at the seven principles and consider which one or ones are implicated.

**Attendance** – Attendance has fluctuated quite a bit this year. Most of our regulars are older and many are involved in sports. Most of their games occur on Sunday mornings. So, depending on the season, we see huge drops in attendance. Most of our regular families stay in touch with me so I know when we will have a lot of students out. That being said, we average about 40 or so each week in RE.

We have seen some fluctuations over the last few years. I would say we still have around 75 students in our program. When I began, we had less than 20 dedicated students. In speaking with families that have been here during a good portion of my time here, a lot of them stayed because of the personal touch I was able to give such as phone calls, hand written notes and one-on-one meetings. With our newer folks I have had less time to develop relationships and figure out what is important to them and what would keep them coming back. I would love to spend more time getting to know our families.

**RE Needs** – Currently the nursery is working with Building and Grounds to have them install Dutch Doors in the nursery and between to two nursery rooms. This will be safer for the infants and toddlers as well as parents and staff who attempt to climb over the current baby gates.

We are also still constantly in need of additional volunteers for one-room days, regular classes and holidays. Additional admin support is also greatly needed.

**Playground** – To date, the playground is still not complete. We are waiting for the installation of the accessible swing. After many phone calls and e-mails, we have still not been able to confirm a final installation date. I have asked Stu Spence and Hank Murray to assist in getting the playground complete. This is the last outstanding item for this phase of the playground. I would like to add additional equipment each year.

**Sub-council** – There is currently not an active RE Sub-council. It was been this way for at least 2 years. When I started, the sub-council had worked really hard to keep things afloat during the ministerial transition. They stayed on to support me but after that were really burnt out. I have worked with Rev. Cathy to recruit and re-energize the Sub-Council, and have not been able to recruit dedicated people. I am able to find people here and there who will help with task or projects but not a core group of people willing to be on a committee. I'm not sure a Sub-Council in a traditional sense is needed but there is a need for dedicated people to help with schedules, curriculum and teacher recruitment.

**Social Justice** – Being the only professional of color at USH, I would like to take a more active role in social justice within our walls and not just as a bystander. I believe the work begins "at home". Before we can promote outwardly, we must take a look inwardly. I have been called on to assist other congregations in breaking down the walls of racism within UU communities but am not being utilized by our own congregation. I would like to see more intentions in this area.

I would also like to support our children and youth more in the social justice cause that are important to them. We have been making list of the things they would like to support. There three main concerns are animal rights, race relations and the legalization of medical marijuana and health care for the poor.

**Safer Congregations** – One of the requirements of a Safer Congregation team is that one of the members is the DRE. It is critical as many of the areas covered/addressed deal with children and youth. We try to meet monthly as a group. Outside of meetings, I work on reviewing current policies and procedures, writing, drafting and amending proposed policies and dealing with situations as they arise along with one of the ministers and the rest of the committee.

**Budget** – I haven't had much change in budget over the last 5 years. I did gain additional nursery care budget but lost some of my budget for Youth Advisor. The last two years I have received funds for OWL and COA of \$500 but other line items were reduced but minimally. I am finding I have to fundraise additional monies needed to fully support the program's needs. Since our new settled ministers have arrived, I have been given a professional development line item which is greatly appreciated and used.

In the future, ideally I would have funds to fully support OWL and COA as I think those programs are so important. I would like to expand OWL to more than just 7-9<sup>th</sup> graders as well. For program cost, I do try to recycle and repurpose as much as I can in order to stay within budget and it would be nice to have more funds but I can definitely make due with those line items staying the same.

My biggest needs budget wise would be for an assistant or admin support and additional hours for my DRE work. I have enjoyed having the help of an RE Assistant on Sunday mornings but there is also a great need for more support in maintaining the classrooms each week, tracking supplies and curriculum as well as scheduling. I have moved to a Google based scheduling system this year that has allowed staff and volunteers to plug in their time and switch days with others. It has helped a lot but I still find I'm spending some weeks 3 or so hours just on scheduling.

Finally having additional resources to continue to grow and expand our playground would be great. More specifically funds to add more accessible equipment and to clear the grounds to allow for wheelchairs. I would also like to add benches and picnic tables so it is a space for all ages.

**Other Activities** – The few years I have offered a once a year Game Night. This year it was in February. I open it up to anyone who has attended USH and to the community at large. I ask people to bring a game and snack to share. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and it was a lot of fun. There were requests to have them more often but I don't currently have the capacity for that.

I would like to have more activities outside of Sunday service that draw our families in. Last year we had some very successful family friendly SGM's but were not able to run them so far this year. So the game night has so far been our only family offering.

The beginning of the program year we ran Secret Buddies for the first time. One adult was paired with a child or youth. They exchanged secret notes and items for the month of October. This was a fun way for them to get to know each other and to also try and figure out who their buddy was. The big reveal came at the pancake breakfast where they found out who their buddy was and had the opportunity to share a breakfast together. This went so well that the plan is to continue the program next year.

**RE Space** – The spaces that we have been using for RE are great. We have made modifications to the nursery and that has helped a lot. I would like to see a revamp of the RE storage space so it is more accessible. The spaces themselves work well. The only downside is when people complain about hearing the children in class.

As the program grows and there are more voices, they will carry. I love to hear them especially when they are laughing and really enjoying their class. But, I do recognize that not everyone shares my joy.

As far as the number of students in each room, most classes work. The middle school, who meet in Servetus, is the only group I am worried about. They are a little tight and in the next year or two maybe too big for that room. We are currently utilizing 3 classrooms upstairs and 3 downstairs.

**Hopes and Vision** – As I reflect on how far the program has come, I still continue to have hopes and dreams for the future. Below are just a few key areas that stand out to me:

I would love to personally continue to learn and train as a DRE. I have looked into both entering a Sacred Studies Course and entering into the UUA DRE Credentialing Program. The Sacred Studies Course is based out of California and would culminate in a ministerial degree after completing the program. I have also looked into, but have not yet entered, the UUA Credentialing program. I have taken 3 renaissance modules as part of the credential coursework. Both programs require about two years to complete and financial resources including study material, travel, registrations fees, etc.

Right now the plan is to continue to alternate between Coming of Age and Our Whole Lives. Currently, the program has only been able to properly run because of several fundraisers I ran last year and a generous donation of \$1,500 from a donor. These funds allowed for the training of two facilitators and the purchase of start-up supplies. The current USH budget is for \$500. There is also supplemental income coming in from the sale of pussy hats that have been donated and made by Esther McKone. My goal is to have enough funds for 1-2 additional people to be trained and yearly funds to support both programs without the need for additional fundraising efforts on my part.

I would like to spend time developing and growing our Youth Group. Nina Elgo and John Bengtson have held that program together for the last few years with the addition of Rob Spector this year. It's a great program but it has not changed or been updated in many years. As the younger students move up, this program needs to grow in order to meet the expectations they have had from the younger grade programs and from OWL and COA.

**Additional Thoughts on Successes** - I would have to say that the one thing I'm most proud of this year is our OWL program. Margalie and Elliot are doing such a phenomenal job. A few weeks ago they had 3 transgender young adults come speak with the group. One student said that the session was the best thing they have ever experienced here at USH. The student considers himself to be a cis male so I thought that statement was huge. Another male student said he appreciates the anatomy of individuals born "female" more after learning about the menstrual cycle. He also said that tampons pads, etc. were no longer gross to him!

This program is also so meaningful as when I started here 5 ½ years ago that was one of the things at the top of my goal list. So to see it happening and to be such a success is really uplifting.

Oh, the other thing that I wanted to achieve here was the installation of a playground. My first week working here I told Rev. Dave that I would be on cloud nine to see the children here running and playing on a playground. It is still a work in progress but it is great to see the kids out there laughing and having fun. It's also great to see another one of my visions come to fruition. I am still very grateful to the Board and the ministers for their instrumental support in helping to get our new playground.

**Additional Thought on challenges** – I am still finding it difficult to recruit and maintain an ideal number of volunteers. Ideally each class would have 4 rotating teachers and 4 rotating assistants. That would give me 24 dedicated volunteers not including help for holidays and one-room Sundays. Right now I have 17 volunteers that rotate. Each week it's a struggle to make sure each class has the two volunteers it needs.

I also struggle finding help with one-room Sundays. If Sarah Cassidy is not available, I still need a second person to assist me. Generally I do all the work, but Safe Congregations requires a second person. There may be other individuals available that I have not asked but I also lack the time to actively and regularly recruit more volunteers.

Additional support on multi-gen Sundays has been a struggle as well. Rev. Cathy and I are generally here on Saturdays and early Sunday mornings setting up and getting ready. I usually stay until 4:00pm on those weeks cleaning up and putting things back together. Having someone on hand to help or someone who can coordinate getting help would be great.

**Next Year** – The only plans I have for next year so far are Coming of Age for our 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders and some type of Neighboring Faith program for them. I have not had the time yet to decide what programs to offer for the other grades or what type of program I would like to offer in the summer. The children will not be leading a Sunday service this year and I am hoping to use that planning time to work on curriculum development for next year.

**Board Support** – What I'd like to see is more Board knowledge and support of what goes on in RE. Currently, the only other person who has a working knowledge of the program is Rev. Cathy. She is such a great support and a wonderful resource for me but the program needs the support of the Board and the full congregation.

I would also like reasonable expectations. If you look at all that is happening in RE from this report, I'm sure you can tell that all of this requires more than the 23.75 hours that are budgeted for me. The remaining hours I give from my love of the program. But in reality I am burnt out. I work 5 jobs and give my heart and soul to this place. But, I either need additional hours in which to do this job or some of the items listed above need to be taken off my plate. When I was hired at 15 hours a week, I was promised I would be at 30 hours by the following year. We are still not at that point and my work load has steadily increased.

Feedback and direction from the Board, parents and the congregation would be welcomed as well. Right now I decide the curriculum and the flow of the classes based on what I would like to see and from input and feedback from other DRE's. My children are in the program so it's also based on what I would like them to have learned or gained from the time they start in nursery until they finish from Youth Group. We offer some great things but I would like an idea of what USH would like to say the children and youth have learned and gained from going through the program here. Finally, Board support and rally around teacher recruitment is needed. We have some great volunteers. We also have some volunteers that should not be helping here in RE. The struggle is I am not able to really pick and choose who can and who cannot volunteer as I don't have enough people to choose from. So if they are willing and able and they pass the background check, there in. That's not really the best way. I've spoken with other denominations where their RE volunteers apply like they would any other job and are interviewed and placed where there is a good fit if that fit exist.

As always, I enjoy talking about the RE program here at USH and love to share what we are doing. Please feel free to check-in with me or ask more questions. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Rayla D. Mattson  
Director of Religious Education

## Safe Congregations – a Status Update from Rev. Cathy, February 2018

### History:

In February 2016 it came to our attention that a Registered Sex Offender on parole was attending USH, and, in accordance with best practices and UUA guidance, we established a “Limited Access Agreement” establishing parameters for this persons involvement for the safety of our children and the protection of this person (ie, they were not allowed to be alone around children at USH). Unfortunately, that person broke the agreement (albeit unintentionally and without harm to children), and we asked them to leave. However, we realized that we needed to bring our Safe Congregations work up to best practices.

The board set about to do that: in April 2016, the board officially set up the Safe Congregations team with the following motions:

Motion 1: *The Board approve using the UUA guidance presented in “Balancing Acts—keeping children safe in congregations” as the basis for how USH addresses issues of a safe congregation.*

Motion 2: *The Board charge the Safe Congregation Team to review existing policies and procedures that ensure congregational safety and make recommendations for new policies or changes to existing policies.*

The initial members were Rev. Cathy, Virginia de Lima (then board-president), Rayla, Joan Nicoll-Senft (RE Subcommittee), Barbara Fraher (social worker), Rick Tsukada (therapist).

### Resources & Best Practices:

[Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations](#) is the best practices manual for this work, and recommends the Safe Congregations Team as follows (from pp9-10):

*“The committee, with the advice and consent of the Board of Trustees, will name a Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team (or other name deemed appropriate) generally made up of the minister, the Religious Educator, and three members of the congregation, preferably with experience in sexual abuse issues. Gender balance will be given consideration in appointments. Although some congregations form such a response team only after there has been an allegation, this is unlikely to provide the wisdom and continuity that is required.*

*The Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response team will generally have the following responsibilities:*

- a. Know about community resources for child abuse, treatment for sex offenders, and support groups for survivors. [SEP]*
- b. Know about state laws regarding reporting. [SEP]*
- c. Be a resource for people to share their concerns. [SEP]*
- d. Evaluate applications for religious education teachers and youth group leaders that are flagged by the religious professionals in the congregation as needing more information or follow up. Facilitate annual training for religious education staff*

- and volunteers on issues, policies, and procedures relevant to sexual/physical abuse.* <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- e. Work with the Religious Education committee to assure that the sex abuse education sections of the Our Whole Lives curricula are offered at each age level.* <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- f. Meet with sex offenders to develop a Limited Access Agreement for participation in church activities.* <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- h. Receive allegations of possible abuse, and develop a process for expeditious handling of such allegations.*

### **What's next**

That team worked all last year on 18 areas of a [Congregational Self Assessment](#) from the [Religious Institute](#), as well as on drafting policy. With myself as de facto Chair of the team, my parental leave made this work challenging last spring, and we are now almost ready to share a draft policy and procedures with you all.

Rick Tsukada (therapist) and Virginia deLima (former board member) contributed greatly to the team and have decided not to continue. Myself, Rayla as DRE, Joan Nicoll-Senft (RE teacher) and Barbara Fraher (social worker) continue to serve. This leaves us with empty spots for a Board Member and other therapist/counseling professional, and at least one man! We also need to recruit or identify someone to chair or co-chair the SC Team, as it's not possible for me to continue in that role.

### **What we're NOT doing**

There are many other layers to a Safe and Healthy congregation – from falls on the ice to fear of an active shooter to disruptive non-sexual behavior. Some of this could (and should!) be addressed with a broader “Disruptive Persons” policy paired with a Congregational Behavioral Covenant. These all need to be addressed and are outside the scope of our work – we are focused primarily on the safety of children (and adults) from sexual predators and sexual harassment.

### **What do we need from the board:**

- Your ideas for new members, including one of you
- Your support in prioritizing this work – particularly finishing the policy this year
- Your understanding about this area of board work that we hope not to need to employ, but inevitably do occasionally need – please let me know what further education you wish for to do this!

February 2018

## Sabbatical Letter & Proposal to/for our Board of Directors

Dear USH Board of Directors,

This letter is flesh out in more detail planning for our first sabbatical leave while serving as Co-Ministers of the Unitarian Society of Hartford. To quote from Co-Ministers (and also clergy couple) Revs. Kathleen Rolenz and Wayne Arnason: "A sabbatical is a very old concept that relates to a period of rest or change, often after six years of service. The root is from the biblical word "Sabbath," meaning the day of rest after 6 days of labor. Unitarian Universalist congregations frequently grant their ministers a sabbatical period with full pay in recognition of their difficult and consuming work. The result is a renewal of the ministers' outlook, new directions of thought, and growth of vision."

We discussed sabbatical briefly at the November 2017 Board meeting and in subsequent Board Exec meetings 2017-January 2018. Treasurer Phil Gardner has brought up multiple times the importance of financially planning ahead for our sabbatical (thank you, Phil!). Here is what is articulated in our (2014) Letter of Agreement:

*Sabbatical Leave* / The Co-Ministers may take sabbatical leave for study, education, writing, meditation, and other forms of professional and spiritual growth. Sabbatical leave accrues at the rate of one month per year of service. Leave may be taken after five years of service. No more than six months of sabbatical leave may be used within any twelve-month period. The dates of the sabbatical plan must be approved by the Board of Directors at least one year in advance. The Congregation will continue full salary, housing allowance, and benefits during sabbatical leave. In the event of the Co-Ministers' resignation, termination, or retirement, unused sabbatical leave is not compensable. The Co-Ministers agree not to resign from full-time service to the Congregation for a minimum of one year following the end of each sabbatical leave. The Congregation agrees to take no action on ministerial tenure during a sabbatical leave.

In reflection with others about the timing of sabbatical and the proposed Capital Campaign/Vision 2020, we feel that it would be best if we take sabbatical before that endeavor is fully underway. With this letter we are proposing that we take the three months of October, November, and December 2019 as a joint, simultaneous sabbatical.

In discussion with colleagues, we've been hearing and learning that more and more of our colleagues are finding it best to take shorter, more frequent sabbaticals, so that there is less strain on the congregation during their absence. We understand that anxiety can arise in the congregation about our being gone and while we are away, and we want to plan well ahead to help assuage that anxiety. For example, prior to taking sabbatical, we want to work together with congregational leadership to form agreements about what sorts of things will and won't happen while we are away.

We recognize that there is no perfect time for us to be away, and taking October-December 2019 feels to us like the closest-to-ideal time in that it is not in conjunction with summer vacation, it would not mean missing the height of the Annual Pledge Drive or Annual Meeting, etc. It would also take place in the next fiscal year (2019-20) so we'd have several months-to-a-year in order to plan out the precise details, budget, etc.

This draft proposal is assuming we go with bringing on an Intern Minister 2018-2020 who could provide substantial worship leadership and pastoral care. If the Board decides not to bring on the Intern Minister, who could help substantially with Ministerial coverage during our absence and would already be paid, then there's a significant increase in both budgeting and coordinating that will need to happen.

There are many questions that will need to be addressed in detail, and together we can generate a list of those. For now this is simply a proposal as to the idea and timing of our sabbatical to begin a conversation together with you and begin to incorporate this possibility into our collaborative future planning.

One thing that would be helpful to sort out--and that will probably change between now and October 2019--is who the best New England UUA Regional Staff person is to help support our congregation during the sabbatical period. Though that is not clear at the moment, there are extensive print resources available at this website:

<https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/support/education/19059.shtml>

These materials include sample brochures to highlight service series during the sabbatical period, sample letters and brochures to the congregation explaining how the sabbatical period will work, etc. I find it helpful that we just did parental leave in February 2017 (February 10-March 10 for Heather, and February 10-May 7 for Cathy, as pre-arranged) so there is some recent-ish congregational experience of carrying on quite well in our absence.

We hope you will consider this proposal carefully and let us know what questions and thoughts arise for you. We look forward to planning for this sabbatical time and coming back to USH with renewed energy, perspective, life experiences, perhaps some accomplishments, and new insights!

Gratefully,

Revs. Heather & Cathy

## **INTERN MINISTER DISCERNMENT REPORT**

**February 21, 2018**

For consideration by the USH Board of Directors

**Intern Minister Discernment Group:** Rev. Heather Rion Starr, Stephanie Briggs, Joe Rubin, Martha Bradley, Phil Gardner

At the request of the Board, this group convened to:

- gather more information about the financial commitment and the UUA funding process
- communicate with and get input from interested parties in the congregation
- evaluate Mark Robel as an intern minister candidate.

### **PROPOSAL:**

- Hire student minister Mark Robel for a 10-month part-time Internship in 2018-19, to continue for a second 10-month term in 2019-20, working approximately 15 hours per week
- Rev. Heather would be the primary Internship Supervisor
- An Internship Committee would be formed to participate in Mark's supervision via monthly meetings. Martha Bradley, Marye Gail Harrison, Diana Heymann, Laurie Kelliher, and Rev. Erica Richmond (our Community Affiliated Minister) have all expressed interest in serving on such a committee.

### **CONGREGATIONAL INPUT:**

We shared information, answered questions, and gathered input from the congregation at the January 28 Board Under the Stairs session (Stephanie, Joe, and Martha were present) and again in greater detail at the February 11 Semi-Annual Meeting (presented by Stephanie with input from Rev. Heather).

Congregational opinion appears to be overwhelmingly positive in favor of taking on an intern. We heard lots of excitement about the possibility of expanded ministry, having more diversity in the pulpit, strengthening our connection to the denomination, as well as getting to support and be a part of a new minister's development process. Others mentioned the opportunity this presents for learning and growth within USH, and how meaningful it could be for USH to expand the impact of its ministry by serving as a Teaching Congregation.

Questions and concerns focused on the financial investment, what the intern would be doing, and whether our co-ministers have capacity to supervise and mentor an intern in addition to all they are currently doing.

<b>FINANCIAL COMMITMENT:</b>
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Estimated compensation is as follows:

Stipend <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· \$725/month from September-June</li><li>· Based on 15 hours/week</li><li>· Intended to include transportation expenses</li></ul>	\$7,250
FICA (7.65%)	\$547
Professional Expenses ( <i>could be less</i> )	\$1,000
<b>YEARLY TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,797</b>

<b>Minimum annual amount USH must commit in order to apply for matching grant (50% of total UUA Recommended Stipend)</b>	<b>\$3,625</b>
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	<i>Year 1</i>	<i>Year 2</i>
Maximum amount of UUA matching grant	\$3,625	\$1,812.50

- The **UUA Recommended Minimum Stipend Amount** for a part-time intern at a congregation of less than 250 members is **\$725/month**. USH currently has 209 members. If we were to exceed 250 members, the recommended stipend amount would increase to \$850/month.
- In conversation with Rev. Heather, Mark indicated that his minimum compensation requirements are much lower than the UUA recommendations reflected above. He expressed that \$1,000 is more than he needs for professional expenses, and he would be willing to accept a monthly stipend in the range of \$350-400.

<b>UUA INTERNSHIP STIPEND MATCHING GRANTS PROGRAM:</b>
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The UUA Ministerial Credentialing Office offers an Internship Stipend Grant program to congregations in order to assist new teaching sites in providing internship stipends during their first year or two. The fund is administered by Rev. David Pettee, Ministerial Credentialing Director. The following information was gathered from communications with Rev. Pettee, as well as the Grant Application.

**1. How much can we request?**

Congregations can request up to one half of the recommended minimum stipend for the first 9 months of a part-time internship (minimum of 15 hours/week).

Congregations can re-apply for a renewal grant for the second year, which would be capped at one half the amount of the first year's stipend grant.

## **2. How are funds administered?**

Applications are due by November 1, 2017, and grants are awarded in December. Grant recipients then have until March 1 to find an intern.

Any money that was promised to a congregation that failed to find an intern becomes available after March 1 for redistribution to congregations on the waiting list. Remainder funds are offered to one congregation at a time, moving down the waiting list until funds are exhausted.

We can get on the waiting list by submitting the Grant Application prior to March 1, 2018. Rev. Heather is prepared to submit our application by February 28 in the event the Board elects to hire Mark.

## **3. Application guidelines/requirements:**

The congregation's governing body must have committed to:

- become a teaching congregation.
- create an Intern Committee prior to the intern's arrival, in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Internship Manual.
- provide at least 50% of the total recommended stipend, regardless of the outcome of an upcoming canvass.

Preference is given to internship sites that will provide the intern with opportunities to engage in anti-racism, anti-oppression and multiculturalism work as a component of their ministerial development.

<b>ABOUT MARK ROBEL:</b>
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Mark is currently finishing his Masters in Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Becoming an ordained minister has been a lifelong dream of his, one that he is excited to be pursuing now after a twenty year career as a pediatric nurse practitioner. He is also an advocate of community outreach and social justice efforts. After many years of work with special needs children, he is currently doing a Field Education placement providing pastoral care at SAGE New York – Service and Advocacy for LGBT elders, which he finds greatly rewarding.

Mark and his husband Tom spent many years in Massachusetts, and since relocating to CT they have been members at All Souls UU congregation in New London. Mark has been involved there with the worship team there and has also taught religious education.

Mark comes highly recommended by All Souls minister Rev. Carolyn Patierno, who encouraged him to approach us about this internship. USH initially appealed to Mark as an internship site not only because of our proximity to his home in New London, but also because of our commitment to and engagement with social justice work.

*Mark's intro letter, which was previously circulated to the Board in January, is attached here for reference.*

<b>INTERVIEW:</b>
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We interviewed Mark via video conference on February 8. The interview team included Rev. Heather, Stephanie, Martha, and Sue Smolski (Worship Associate coordinator).

Mark was candid in his responses, grounded and realistic in his approach to ministry, while still acknowledging the importance of spirituality and mystery. He spoke of worship as a tapestry created of many elements, each of which contributes to a successful experience for congregants. His life experience and ambitions accord with and support his present career path.

He demonstrated self-awareness and a sense of humor, as well as a willingness to ask direct questions and seek clarification when needed. He effectively created a short closing prayer, upon request, for the end of the interview.

Mark's goals for the internship include gaining an understanding of congregational operations and governance, increasing his experience in creating and delivering sermons, participating in USH's social justice work, and being in deepening relationship with the congregation over the two year internship period. He also expressed an interest in adult religious education, an area that the Board has identified as a priority.

In his thank you note, he said that he appreciated the opportunity to get to know us and our congregation, and expressed that he feels even more committed to following this process through – wherever it leads us – after spending some time with all of us.

**The interview team was in agreement that Mark is an ideal intern candidate for USH, and would strongly recommend him for the role.**