

# Unitarian Society of Hartford



## Annual Report May, 2021

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**Annual Meeting Minutes of USH 2020**

**Conducted via Zoom because of pandemic**

- 1) Call to order and brief explanation of today's Zoom meeting process     Joe Rubin, President
- 2) Reflection/Reading     Martha Bradley, President  
Elect
- 3) Approval of May 19, 2019, Annual Meeting minutes     Joe Rubin
- 4) USH and me     Tara Cote
- 5) Acceptance of USH designation as a UUA Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry (AIM)  
congregation -     Judy Sullivan
- 6) USH and me     Miriam Byroade
- 7) Acceptance and approval of Report of Nominating Committee     Sherry Manetta, Chair  
(Election of Officers and Board members)
- 8) Secretary's Report - Remembrance of members we lost this year     Sarah Harmon McKenzie,  
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- 10) Brief financial report/summary     Phil Gardener, Treasurer
- 11) What's next for USH?     Joe Rubin and Martha  
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- 12) Q and A (of general interest only, please) and closing remarks     Joe Rubin and Martha  
Bradley
- 11) Closing reflection     Rev. Heather Rion  
Starr "Blessing on Those Staying Home," by Rev. Linda Barnes
- 12) Adjourn     Joe Rubin

**Meeting called to order by Joe Rubin at 11:47am**

11:48 - Martha shared a reflection from Pema Chodron

11:49 – Vote to approve Minutes of 2019 Annual Meeting – approved unanimously

11:50 – Tara Cote gave her thoughts about USH

11:54 – Vote on the Designation as a UUA AIM Congregation presented by Judy Sullivan – USH is only the 6<sup>th</sup> UU Congregation in the country to become UUA certified as an AIM Congregation. Judy made the motion to accept the designation from the UUA, a second was offered. No objections to the motion were noted – approved unanimously

11:59 – Myriam Byroade gave her thoughts on USH

12:01 – Vote to approve Report of the Nominating Committee of Board Nominations beginning July 1, 2020. Sherry Manetta made the motion, Fred Louis seconded.

President – Martha Bradley, for 1 year  
President-Elect – Lisa Galinski, for 1 year  
Treasurer – Bob Hewey, for 2 years  
Chair, Administration – Jon Covault, for 2 years  
Chair, Community Within – Tina Davies, for 2 years

Motion was unanimously approved.

12:06 – Secretary’s Report. We certified at 211 members in February. The names of the members/former members who have died in the past year are:

Jeanne Auerbach (formerly Cohen)  
JoAnne Bauer  
Jane Christensen  
Richard (Dick) Edwards  
Vinnie Hall  
Harry Lanser  
Elizabeth (Betsy) Mahaffey  
Ed Richardson  
Ed Stockton  
Sara Sturges  
Sherry Williams

12:08 – Gloria Francesca Mengual gave her thoughts on USH

12:12 – Update from Treasurer, Phil Gardner

12:14 – What’s going on at USH and what is coming up next at USH. Joe gave highlights of current year: A successful Sabbatical, USH was a Founding Member of GHIAA, and Thanks to all who have worked so hard to move church as seamlessly as possible to an online platform. Martha gave highlights of upcoming year: UUA recommends that services stay online through May 2021, smaller gatherings may be able to happen when it is safe to do so.

12:19 – Questions? Bob White asked re: the UUA guidance about the next year, what will the status of the lighting project be? We don’t know at this time. We will keep the congregation updated. Peter Meny was wondering if any consideration has been given to holding services outside. Martha – we haven’t officially considered it, the Board will discuss in the upcoming months. Sarah Krippenstapel – wondering about any level of online RE? Rayla had set up some online RE, and only one person showed up, has gotten no responses to queries in the e-

news. Kerry White expressed her appreciation for the online services, and if in-person services commence before next May, if the online version could continue for those who didn't feel safe congregating. Deb Meny – would like to see a more multi-media access, rather than just the pre-recorded services. Laurie Kelleher made a request to send all your ideas about how you want to see worship, share them with the Worship Committee and the Board.

12:29 – Rev. Heather shared a Closing Reflection from Rev. Linda Barnes

12:34 – Joe Rubin adjourned the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Unitarian Society of Hartford.

Respectfully Submitted, Sarah H. McKenzie, Secretary

## **USH 2021 Annual Meeting: Current Bios of Candidates**

### **For President Elect, Rob Spector**

Rob Spector has been a member of the Unitarian Society of Hartford since 1997. He was raised in the Unitarian Church, attending churches in Maryland and New York as a child. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree, *summa cum laude*, from Colgate University in 1993, and in 1996, he graduated with a Juris Doctor degree from Yale Law School. In law school, he was executive director of New Haven Cares, a non-profit organization that provided food and shelter vouchers to homeless individuals in New Haven.

From 1996 through 1998, Rob served as a law clerk for the Honorable Alan H. Nevas in Bridgeport federal court, and from 1998 through 2001, he worked as a state prosecutor in the Appellate Bureau of the Connecticut Chief States Attorney's Office. During this time, he also taught Moot Court and Lawyering Process as an adjunct professor at University of Connecticut Law School.

Rob began as an Assistant United States Attorney with the United States Attorney's Office in New Haven in 2002 and served as a supervisor there, in various capacities, from 2007 through 2018. From 2007 through 2010, he supervised a statewide gang and firearms unit; from 2011 through 2013, he was Deputy Chief of the Appeals Unit; from 2014 through 2018, he was Chief of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force; and, from 2016 through 2018, he led a task force charged with battling Connecticut's opioid epidemic. From 2012 through 2016, he taught constitutional and criminal law at two different high schools in Hartford, and, from 2016 through 2018, he headed a team responsible for making opioid awareness presentations at middle schools and high schools across Connecticut. In 2016, he was a contributing author to the Connecticut Law Tribune's Connecticut Criminal Procedure Handbook.

He was sworn in as a United States Magistrate Judge on May 1, 2018 and sits in New Haven federal court.

**As Secretary, Sarah McKenzie.**

Sarah first began attending services at USH in August of 2014 (although she had been here as a teen for YRUU conferences). Prior to then, she had been attending the Universalist Church of West Hartford sporadically, since she was in sixth grade (with a long break when she lived in Vermont). Since coming here to USH, she has been involved with the Choir, Meetinghouse, and is currently serving on the Interim Search Committee, and has been a member of the Board since 2017. Along with her husband Owen, she is thrilled to have such a warm and supportive community here at USH for their family to be a part of.

**For Treasurer, Bob Hewey**

Bob's spiritual path led him to the UU congregation in Manchester in 1995. At UUS:E Bob served in several Board positions, including President and Treasurer. When he and his wife Carol moved to Seabury in Bloomfield in 2012, they started sharing time between UUS:E and the USH congregations. Bob Joined USH last year and now supports and has membership in both. Professionally, Bob worked his entire career at The Hartford, mostly in Information Technology, retiring in 1998. He has been a lifelong numismatist and is active in several local, regional and national Coin Clubs.

**For Council Chair, Administration, Jon Covault**

Jon Covault has been a member of UU congregations for past 20 years including in Provincetown, Northampton, and Springfield where he served as auditor for 1 year. For the past 8 years he and his husband Michael have attended the Unitarian Society of Hartford. Jon is a long-time transplant to New England from Iowa where he grew up attending Lutheran services. He enjoys spending time in the summer with Mike at their rustic camp in Maine on Moosehead Lake and when at home in Simsbury, time in the garden and walking the Ethel Walker School Trails with Mike and their dog Rocky.

**For Council Chair, Community Within, Tina Davies**

Tina Davies came to USH in 2008; she's identified as a Unitarian for about 30 years now. Here, she's often in the choir, and has served as board Secretary (2011-13) and Chair for Community Within (2014-16). According to Wikipedia, the

number "three" has religious or cultural significance in many societies, suggesting wholeness, or completion. Returning to the board for a third term of service, then, feels appropriate and well, complete. Tina is now fully retired, barring unforeseen enticements, and enjoys spending time in nature, playing with fabric, reading, and enjoying the antics of her cats.

### **For Endowment Committee and Chair of Endowment Committee, Steve Basche**

Steve has served as chair of the endowment committee for the past two years and was a member of the committee the year before that. He is an estate planning and probate attorney and lives in West Hartford, with his wife Marie (a/k/a Anna). He and Marie have been members of USH since 2016. Steve serves on the Jewish Association for Community Living board of directors. Steve has three children, Ben, Arianna, and Matthew, and one grandchild, Samuel (with another on the way).

### **For Endowment Committee, Eve Pech**

I've been a member of USH for over 35 years singing in the choir long ago and more recently chair of the Caring Network. My husband and I joined USH after our first child was born because we wanted to have our children learn about religion from an all embracing point of view. Now that they are grown, we value USH for its inspiration, solace, and community. My professional background is in global education.

## **USH Annual Report May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

### **USH President's Report for 2020-2021**

Martha Bradley, President

This has been an extraordinary year by any measure. The 2020-21 church year began with the Meeting House closed due to Covid19, and all services and meetings taking place online. In addition to the economic, social, and emotional stress of the pandemic, we had the added social and emotional stressors of sometimes violent protests around the killing of black Americans by police, especially the murder of George Floyd, the stark divisions within the country around the 2020 election, and continued false charges of voter fraud that ultimately led to the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6.

Internally, our Ministers, staff, leaders, and volunteers worked to insure that USH would remain strong amid these volatile and rapidly changing circumstances, by maintaining our connections to one another and the greater community.

Among our successes:

Our first online auction fundraiser and Stewardship campaign

Certification as an AIM (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry) congregation

Spirit Life, a new adult curriculum exploring spirituality

Continued participation in GHIAA (Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance)

A series of listening sessions for the congregation around the future of USH

Participation in the UU the vote campaign.

Most recently, our Ministers for the past seven years, Reverends Cathy and Heather Rion Starr, have announced that they are moving on to a new phase of their lives and careers. We will miss their guidance and dedication, and the delight of watching Robin and Braden growing up. A search committee has begun the work of finding an Interim Minister for USH, who can guide us in self-reflection and growth for the next two years, in preparation for the search for a new settled minister.

Other key goals include:

Re-opening the Meeting House for in-person worship and RE in September

Re-establishing a sub-committee of the Board to complete the work of creating a healthy relations policy for USH

Rebuilding the RE, Membership, and Stewardship sub-councils

This year has brought challenges, learning, and inspiration that could not have been anticipated. We have so far met the challenges together, and, I have no doubt, we will use what we have learned to meet whatever challenges are yet to come.

## **Secretary's Report for 2020-2021**

Sarah McKenzie

As of February 1, of this year, USH certified 200 members to the Unitarian Universalist Association, a slight decrease over last year. In previous years, this number would determine our "fair share" contribution to the UUA, but as of 2018 the "fair share" contribution is calculated as a percentage of operating expenses rather than based on the number of members.

In the past year, the following members have passed away:

Betty Arnold

Jane Bronk  
Paul Christie  
Milly Geeter  
Nita Hansen  
Joanne McClurg  
Thomas Reed  
Sharon Scully  
LeRoy Spaniol (husband of USH member Susan Spaniol)

We have welcomed 3 new members during the past year

**USH Nominating Committee Report to Board of Directors**

Unitarian Society of Hartford April 14, 2021 updated April 19, 2021

**Candidates for Board of Directors**

The Nominating Committee recommended the following candidates be submitted for a congregational vote that will take place at the Annual Meeting in May via Zoom. All terms will begin July 1, 2021.

President, for 1-year term	Martha Bradley
President Elect, for 1-year term	Rob Spector
Treasurer, for 2-year term	Bob Hewey
Council Chair, Administration, for 2-year term	Jon Covault
Council Chair, Community Within, for 2-year term	Tina Davies

**Endowment and Legacy Giving Committee**

The Nominating Committee recommended the Board approve the following candidate to fill open positions on the Endowment Committee.

Steve Basche	for a second 3-year term beginning July 1, 2021
Steve Basche	Chair of Endowment Committee for a 1-year term beginning July 1, 2021

Eve Pech	for a second 3-year term beginning July 1, 2020
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## **AIM Committee**

### **AIM (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry)**

AIM became officially certified by UUA at General Assembly last spring! Equal Access/AIM will continue to be a group under the Council of Social Justice. Susan Hope is stepping down as co-chair this year. Doris Maldonado will continue as co-chair for another year. The group will need to reorganize following the pandemic and new members and ideas for continuing to improve our accessibility and inclusivity will be needed.

The disability support group continued to meet this year, via Zoom and later Google Meets—once/month with at least 7 members. The group is open to those with disabilities as well as family members or support persons. Closed captioning is available. Don Hope has facilitated the group.

The weekly Zoom service was offered with closed captioning. There were significant improvements made to the sound system in the sanctuary, which will be appreciated when we can gather there again. Members of B&G have been working on setting up cameras in the church, with the goal of having the services streamed in the future, which will help members who cannot be physically present for the service.

## **Archives Annual Report 2020-2021**

Larry Lunden, Chair

**Our mission:** The Archives: Serves as the institutional memory of USH. Identifies, acquires, and maintains records of enduring value that chronicle the development of the church. Preserves essential evidence of the church, including day to day records that have permanent significance. Gives future generations a place to research the church's history.

### **Our accomplishments this year:**

I got a request from Jim Venneman of the interim search committee. I found the information packet from our last interim search, and the committee is using it to help with the current search effort.

Since 2006 very few minutes have been contributed to the Archives. None from the Board or Councils.

We are receiving the E-News, which I file. There have been no orders of service or recordings to file.

**Our plans for next year:**

Continue to accept in new records and file them in an organized manner. I may start looking into a method of storing digital records, which we don't have. Due to rapidly evolving technology, digital records have a much shorter life than paper records, 5 to 10 years in contrast to 200 years or more. Any committee that has digital records that they would like to contribute, please contact me.

**Administration Council 2020-2021**

Jon Covault, Council Chairperson

The Administration Council is comprised of the following sub-councils (chairperson):

Ambulatory Art (Diane Cadrain)

Archives (Larry Lunden)

Building and Grounds (Stuart Spence)

Finance (Bob Hewey-treasurer/Phillip Gardner-bookkeeper)

Human Resources (Greg Nickett)

Library (Open) and  
Stewardship (Open).

2020-2021 annual report / highlights are provided below.

**Ambulatory Art**

**Chair:** Diane Cadrain

The Ambulatory Art Committee got off to an energetic start with a show of Miriam Byroade's art quilts. Unfortunately, the opening of Miriam's show coincided with the closing of the world due to Covid. Other interested congregants and friends who attended our foundational meeting include Tina Davies, Maggie Greene, Marye Gail Harrison, Evan Williams, Martha Bradley, Bev Spence, Sue Tenorio, Carol Vionick, and Miriam Byroade.

**Human Resources**

**Chair:** Greg Nickett

**Our mission:** To assist the board and minister(s) with personnel administration and to ensure compliance with state and federal employment laws and regulations.

Brian Mullen (USH bookkeeper) and Bob Hewey (treasurer) led the USH efforts to secure a grant from the Paycheck Protection Program to support staff employment during the COVID pandemic this past year. We thank all of our USH staff members for their dedication and contributions to support ongoing and new (i.e. online services) USH activities during the past year. The board has continued to review compensation with the median wage recommendation from UUA for each position for a congregation of our size/region as a goal.

### **Stewardship Sub-council**

**Chair:** Open

Members/volunteers: Jon Covault, Caron Lanouette, Giny Hendricks, Bob Hewey, Tara Cote, Martha Bradley, Lisa Galinski, Peter Meny, and Jim Venneman.

We had a successful Fall auction themed “Putting Fun in Fundraising” with an online silent auction running for 4 weeks followed by a live auction with Bob Hewey as auctioneer on Sunday November 15, 2020. 42 donors offered 63 items for auction. We had 28 winning bidders who purchased 42 items. Importantly, 22 of the purchased items were services or activities that support continued contact (some virtual, some for post-COVID) helping to reduce our sense of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The auction raised over \$5,000 for USH.

Martha Bradley, Peter Meny and Jim Venneman led our Spring Stewardship pledge campaign. A series of 5 listening sessions were held in January to hear what members were thinking about the current ways we are connecting during our time away from the sanctuary and thoughts about the upcoming church year. One clear message was the desire to have options to attend services in person (when that time arrives) or virtually as online services have allowed some with transportation or health issues to participate in the life of USH during the COVID winter of 2020-21. The Board is working to develop live streaming capacity at USH in response.

The March stewardship campaign started at our Sunday Worship service on March 7 “Loved Into Being - UUA 2021 Stewardship Service” and included discussion at coffee hour small groups on what we each cherish about our association with USH. Three services in March included testimonials by members about the meaning of USH in their lives. Members / friends have been generous and responsive to our March-April pledge drive; we are well on our way to reaching our pledge goals (pledge units and pledge amounts) as we enter the last quarter of

our church year. We are thankful for everyone's contributions during what have been difficult times for many.

### **Building and Grounds Sub-Council 2020-2021**

**Chair:** Stu Spence

**Members:** Stu Spence, Paul Cipriano, Laura Cipriano, Toni Gold, Bill Simmons, Peter Meny, David Newton, Ron Sexton, Jim Venneman, Fred Louis, Hugh Schweitzer - Friends of B&G: Janice Newton, Tina Davies

**Minister Liaison:** Rev. Heather Rion Starr

**Staff:** John Bengtson & Kevin Girouard, Briana Bittel, & Jaz Perez-Acevedo

**Our Mission:** To maintain and improve the physical plant and surrounding grounds of the Meeting House of the Unitarian Society of Hartford.

During the spring of 2020 Building and Grounds was carrying out repairs to the Chancel sound system by replacing a failing amplifier and a second one of equal age in addition to adding digital controls (a Behringer X Air R18 Digital Rackmount Mixer). The installation of new equipment was done by Raintech, Sound and Communications, Inc.

As this activity was concluded, Covid-19 basically closed down further use of our Meeting House. As this Annual Report is written, we are looking forward to adequate immunizations to create herd immunity with a return to use of our facilities reasonably soon.

From spring of 2020 to spring 2021, to the extent possible, improvements were made to the building using the opportunity presented by its lack of use. This also included looking after the building under the new conditions of disuse. Communications featured a relatively new software known as Zoom, which turned out to be popular throughout the nation and elsewhere in the world during the global epidemic.

A sizable tree was moved from the South West Garden to a new Location.

Continuing efforts to carry out the Sanctuary Lighting improvements continued until the necessary architectural paperwork for bidding was complete, but further action was delayed.

Over the years, expense for water used in the Knox Gardens during the summer was reimbursed to USH. Elimination of confusion over the past practice and billing was undertaken by the USH Treasurer, Bob Hewey, with some success in past due payments made to USH. Meanwhile, use of water within the Meeting

House and the discovery of the water meter at the top of the north drive adjacent to Bloomfield Avenue were explored to make sure no water was leaking from the system within or between the building and Knox Gardens.

General Maintenance activities were continued. Such things as repair of broken thermostats, malfunctioning valves, repair of previously damaged pews from the leaking sanctuary roof now repaired. Inspection of the roof drains and some repairs of the Plexiglas surrounding the sanctuary pit in the roof architecture, deep cleaning of carpets throughout the building, painting and generally cleaning up of all areas inside and outside have continued especially those benefiting from unused facilities at the time. The benches in the Memorial Garden were cleaned and refinished. A new refrigerator was purchased

The Library Bay water leak into the Fellowship Hall restroom and Classroom A continued to plague us. The drainage system along the library bay was removed and replaced with necessary repairs along with various other measures. The effort to identify the flaws causing most of the problem will continue.

As USH moved to remote Zoom, YouTube & Facebook communications, it became clear there was a great desire to move back to the Meeting House for services, but congregants saw considerable benefits to the remote participation in services as an option when we return to regular attendance habits. Accordingly, with the leadership of Jon Covault & Paul and Laura Cipriano, B&G appropriated about \$12,000 for acquisition of hardware and software to successfully export live services to remote computers and otherwise conduct various meetings with combinations of in-person and external attendance. As this is written, the cameras have arrived and are being installed, the upload Comcast service has been increased and a TV/computer unit has been established for use for hybrid meetings. These new capabilities will also involve a good deal of user education and content upgrades.

Our solar panels installed in 2016 and associated equipment continue to produce about as much electricity as the Meeting House consumes in a year. The Board has determined to exercise its option to purchase this equipment from the Sole Proprietor, David Newton, and the closing date has been determined as June 30, 2021. This action will have completed the original plan to obtain the equipment for the benefit of USH realizing the 30 percent incentive and CT ZREC incentives ultimately for USH, a non-profit non-tax paying organization. After June 30, electrical costs for the Meeting House will be comparatively trivial for the next 10 years or more.

**Our plans for next year:** We will continue to work on existing unfinished tasks and such new ones as arise.

We particularly appreciate the efforts of staff and volunteers who make possible the essential activities of the Building and Grounds Sub-Council. Submitted by David Newton Secretary Pro Tem

### **Church Office 2020-2021**

Buffie Pinney, Office Administrator

I came to USH via Robert Half Agency as of September of 2019, and happily remain to date as of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I have continued to make progress in my role here despite the many restrictions and challenges facing all staff here at USH due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. My goals as always are to continue to enhance and fine tune my responsibilities/skills here as Office Administrator while continuing to work closely to support the incoming Intern Minister, the Board, my team, and congregant members. I continue to expand my knowledge base so I may better serve the community here at USH and look forward to my continued assignment here.

### **Community Within 2020-2021**

Christina Davies, Council Chair

This was the year when the adjective “virtual” became, for many of us, inextricably entwined with the noun “community”. Without Zoom, it would have been a bleak year indeed. We could not gather in person; we could not come to the Meeting House at all. That we have preserved the level of connection and community which exists, owes an enormous debt to our staff and volunteers who’ve made possible the coffee hours, meetings, get-togethers, and other online gatherings.

Many participated in these Zooms and appreciated the ability to communicate, albeit at a distance. Others admitted Zoom fatigue, and are waiting for wider in-person opportunities. Yet others, we hope, are still in the wings, waiting to emerge. It’s been a challenge.

Among the highlights are the aforementioned coffee hour (thank you to all the hosts!); the Caring Network; Membership; and those programs able to function in a virtual environment:

**Caring Network:** Eve Pech, Chair - The mission, facilitated by the generosity of volunteers, is to provide comfort and assistance as needed to those within the Unitarian Society of Hartford community.

During the year, this active group “checked in” with *all* members and friends listed in the USH Directory. Phone calls were made in late spring 2020, and again in summer, following up with notecards, to see how people were doing with Covid and related challenges. In addition to this campaign, cards and notes of concern, congratulations, and sympathy to our USH members and friends were sent.

Through the pandemic, the Network provided transportation to members and friends to medical appointments and used GrubHub and Take-Them-A-Meal to assist those needing this kind of help.

Other activities included presentation at a Faith Forward session, and encouraging USH folks, through our E-News, to become vaccinated against the Covid-19 virus.

**Membership:** Carolyn Carlson, Chair — Membership activities were necessarily curtailed during shutdown. However, this sub council was a strong behind-the-scenes force in facilitating during coffee hours, following up with visitors, and providing a welcoming if virtual entry to USH. The *Inquirers’ Series*, a new-to-us introductory program series for newcomers, was unveiled last fall, and a slightly modified and streamlined version was presented this spring. This series supplants *UU, USH, and You* - our previous introduction.

Even with distancing necessitated by the pandemic, we welcomed several new members and quite a few new visitors this year. We hope to welcome these, and more, in person... SOON!

**Adult Programs:** chair vacant - The good news was that a number of established ongoing programs were able successfully to transition to Zoom. The book group continued meeting without interruption; *Artist’s Way* has been gathering; two cycles of Connection Circles, with two groups during each cycle, connected. Some other gatherings have been successful, and the auction provided opportunities for people to meet online or, recently in person.

Activities which couldn’t easily be translated to Zoom are on hiatus. **Meeting House Presents** is lining up performers, in hopes that live performance will be possible come September. Saturday sing-alongs may start up soon, using outdoor space. The Lunch Bunch will determine its own future, and *Dinner and a Movie* will need new leadership. All these, as well as any new ventures, will need committed support from interested members if they are to thrive.

## **Intern Minister 2020-2021**

Dianne Daniels, Intern Minister

I began my position as your Intern Minister in January 2020, and it's been an educational and edifying ride. I'm in my third year of Seminary at Starr King School for the Ministry and looking forward to completing my Master's degree by Spring of 2021. I've loved being included in services at USH – from being a part of the worship team, handling the Turning Inward section of services, and preaching, you've all been an important part of my formation as a Candidate Minister. I've learned a LOT in my time at USH – there are so many wonderful people in the congregation who have endeared themselves to me – you're all now part of my family. The many changes have been implemented during the pandemic have resulted in levels of growth I wasn't expecting, but I'm so grateful for. I'm looking forward to more learning, staying in touch with the congregation, and returning to the pulpit LIVE in the fall. It's been a year of development, a year of changes, and a year of growth. I'm looking forward to what the Fall will bring.

## **Religious Education Material 2020-2021**

Rayla D. Mattson, DRE

Chairs, Co-Chairs: Currently Vacant Members: Currently Vacant

**Our mission:** To guide our youth and children in gaining a respect and appreciation for themselves, others, all living things and the environment; becoming integral parts of our Meeting House family; developing an awareness of, and appreciation for, our Judeo-Christian heritage and other world religions that influence the formation of our religious beliefs; experiencing the joy and inspiration of music and the arts; becoming responsible persons who are able to make ethical decisions in which they show their care and concern for all humanity; to welcome all children, including those with special needs, and will make every effort to accommodate all children into our program.

**Snapshot of our year:** The program covers children and youth from birth through the completion of their senior year of high school. The program is supported through the collaborative efforts of our co-ministers, the DRE, RE staff and over 30 Congregational volunteers.

This year has been challenging and rewarding. Never did I imagine ever having an entire year online and not being able to see our children and youth in person each week. The teens were able to gather for apple picking and we planned one all ages walk. The youth group flourished this year and our group actually grew! We planned our gatherings around Dungeons and Dragons and a youth member, Bradshaw Mattson, led the group under the supervision of our youth advisor, Paul Jacob and the DRE. Our 3rd-8th graders met online and followed a curriculum based on Disney Pixar's Shorts under the leadership of our RE Assistant, Dominique Bourgeois. Our younger ones received postcards and coloring sheets and stickers through the mail.

**Our plans for next year:** We will continue to work towards our goals outlined in the mission statement. We will continue to update our curriculum materials and continue to strive to have each age group engaged in some type of social justice project. Additionally we will work to connect our children and youth to the broader, world-wide UU faith community. We will make modifications to this according to the recommended guidelines in order to keep our children and youth healthy and safe as we move towards being back in person.

### **Social Justice 2020-2021**

Dana Donovan, Chair

I was asked to take on the position of council chair in December of 2020. Judy Sullivan had asked to step down as, due to several pressing family situations, she felt she couldn't devote sufficient time and energy as council chair. Prior to this Judy had done an excellent job as chair and I am grateful to her for making the transition as easy as possible and for her continued guidance these last few months.

Much of the work of the Social Justice Council has been put on hold over the last year due to Covid-19. But it has progressed in various areas and there has been some notable achievements and activity over the last year, including:

The work of the Equal Access/AIM committee resulted in USH becoming certified as an AIM congregation (Accessibility & Inclusion Ministry). Thanks go to Bill LaPorte-Bryan, Doris Maldonado, Susan Hope and others for their hard work.

The continuing work with GHIAA, the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance. Under their leadership and perseverance the State of CT passed as bill this year to eliminate the welfare liens law that had unjustly targeted low income persons. GHIAA is now pushing for a clean slate law whereby people are not

punished for the rest of their lives for non-violent offences they may have committed. GHIAA is also working to get the state to adopt a uniform housing code to enable the state to have more control over slumlord violations.

Over the summer and fall many members and youth of USH participated in several civic actions in support of Black Lives Matter and other racial injustice issues.

Since GA last year many USH members have been involved in UU The Vote and phone banking, spearheaded by Rev Cathy who became a regional organizer for UU The Vote. I believe that the work of UU's across the country played a significant role in the outcome of the 2020 elections.

There are 9 various subcommittees under the Social Justice umbrella and the following is a brief summary of their work:

The Village for Families and Children - Joanne Orlando reports:

In the summer of 2020, the Village for Families and children held its annual Uniform Fundraiser. The Unitarian Society of Hartford participated in the Uniform Fundraiser and donated \$1,670 to The Village. This large donation, especially during the pandemic demonstrated the unwavering support of USH for The Village.

I attended the virtual Annual Meeting of The Village on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and reported back to the congregation.

In the Village for Families and Children Annual Report, USH was recognized as an honor society for contributing over \$1,000 a year to The Village.

Over the past year, e-news briefs have reported on how The Village has responded to the pandemic, describing services offered to children, families and adults.

Noah Webster Partnership – Diana Heymann reports:

There has been no change in the Noah Webster sub-committee due to Covid-19.

Food Pantries – Deb Meny, John Bengtson

Due to Covid-19 the Youth Group has not been able to hold their monthly soup preparations for the soup kitchen as well as the congregational sales during coffee hour. However, John Bengtson has continued to prepare soup at his home and deliver it to the soup kitchen. He has been aided in this project by the Spector family and others who prepare and donate the vegetables for the soup and bring them to John. We owe a debt of gratitude to John, the Spectors, and others for their work and dedication.

### Upper Albany NRZ – Ed Savage

There has been no change in the Upper Albany NRZ sub-committee due to Covid-19.

### Race Matters – Gloria Francesca Mengual reports:

The mandatory ‘down’ time associated with the COVID pandemic provided an opportunity during the spring and into the summer of 2020 for quiet contemplation about many things, including this country’s racial history beyond the two-page version we learned in high school American History class. I facilitated discussions about articles that appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* as part of *The 1619 Project*, launched during the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of slavery in the U.S. in August 2019. The conversations focused not only on the history described in the articles, but also on how the injustices written into the U.S. legal system continue to this day. During the six Zoom sessions, the group size varied from 8 – 14 participants and the articles and conversations covered racial inequities in a variety of areas: housing, education, medicine, employment, government grants and much more. These conversations provided an opportunity for meaningful reflection about racism from both a historical context, as well as from the perspective of current events – the murder of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, etc. Some opted to listen to the 1619 Project podcast versions of the NYT Magazine 1619 articles. Whichever option each participant selected to take in this information, the end result was rich conversation, mixed with quiet reflection and a hope that now is the beginning of a time for substantive change in this country.

### Refugee Resettlement – Richard Groothuis reports:

The Al Asmi family is doing well, despite the pandemic. Fadi was out of work for long periods due to business closures, but is now employed, nearly full time, at Hartford Baking. Fadi and Eman are studying for and planning to take the citizenship exam, as they have now been in the United States for 5 years.

### Knox Inc. – Rev Heather

USH has had a relationship with Knox Inc. since Revs Heather and Cathy began their ministry. Knox Inc. does extensive community and outreach work throughout the Hartford area. Thanks to Rev Heather USH has a garden plot with a labyrinth in the Knox Community Garden at the end of the parking lot behind the meeting house. In addition, each year in August, USH, in cooperation with the Village for Families and Children, have hosted the annual Knox Garden Party on the lawn

between USH and the Village – at least until Covid-19 hit last year when it went online. Rev Heather has been the contact person between USH and Knox Inc. As Heather is leaving we will need to find another person to fill this role. Thanks also goes to Esther McKone, Susan Hope, Diane Cadrain, Bill Simmons, Rayla Mattson and the RE group, and many others for making the labyrinth a reality.

Green Sanctuary – Mary Sherwin, Jeff Howard

Mary reported that there has not been any GA activity during Covid-19, but that they are hoping to get going again once things get closer to normal.

Equal Access/AIM – Bill LaPort Bryan, Doris Maldonado, Susan Hope

Doris Maldonado reports:

Unfortunately, no one has stepped up for AIM since I stepped away, then Bill and then Susan. Susan and Don Hope are, however, still hosting the monthly disabilities zoom group. I have represented USH AIM legislatively when testifying on bills impacting disabilities and racism as a public health crisis. I've also represented on our behalf during Ministerial Health Fellowship meetings and with the Mosque in Meriden working on a future collaborative hopefully in the summer. The congregation is benefiting from AIM'S Initiative to make our services more accessible via zoom and with captioning. Our luggage support and donations have benefited the homeless population in Hartford since DCF was at a standstill due to COVID. My son, Tyler, who's a member of the youth group, suggested we help the homeless who were greatly impacted more because of COVID, evictions and business shut downs. The luggage is in collaboration with Officer Jim Barrett who services that population from his police truck filled with supplies.

As Doris noted, all the point persons for this sub-committee have had to step down for various reasons, and we will need to find others to continue the work.

### **Spiritual Life 2020-2021**

Peter Meny, Chair

The Spiritual Life Council includes the following subgroups: Worship Associates, Religious Education, Music, SpiritLife, and Chancel Arts.

Worship Associates: We didn't miss a beat. The state shut down on Thursday March 12, 2020 and we sent our Sunday service into congregants' homes on Sunday March 15th. Whirlwind action in the midst of nationwide panic, disbelief and confusion was met by the calming presence of worship and thus the USH worship team and the worship associates have continued on-screen for more than a year.

Revs Cathy and Heather gave reassurance. The worship associates mastered the technical aspects and strengthened continuity with their inspiring words and familiar faces. Buffie Pinney was the behind-the-scenes presence and Rayla Baldwin Mattson led our children with stories and activities. Sam Moffett, Sam Moffett, Sam Moffett... the words do not exist to thank Sam for enveloping the congregation in the beauty as well as excitement of their ever-expanding musical finesse. Musician, technical master, composer, they have given our worship life continuity. When you see the Zoom shifting from person to person, to videos or chalice lighting words you are witnessing Sam's work behind the curtain.

The past year has been filled with pandemic anxiety, sadness and loss and we all long for our collective spiritual angst to lessen, but two aspects of USH spiritual life have changed and hopefully will continue.

Our UU world has expanded. We have had joint services held with New London All Souls, Fern Street, and UU East. Our Unitarian Universalist faith is so much richer as we experience other churches' worship services, ministers, lay leaders, music...and our voyeuristic pleasure in exploring the church interiors around Connecticut. We can Zoom to worship anywhere in the country and for a new level of enrichment everyone can go to General Assembly.

“Everyone” can be one of our new goals. As Doris Maldonado and AIM (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry) have emphasized, “accommodation for a person with disabilities is a universal accommodation”. The pandemic compelled USH to develop worship at home and the technological marvels now offer closed captioning as well. Glitches occur and we learn and learn.

September 12th we will explode with the excitement of returning to our cherished Meeting House for Ingathering. We will have one another and be held by our new interim minister in worship. People at home will participate because we have learned to live-stream straight to the living room. Closed captioning, new audio/visual equipment will increase our access and we will strengthen our ties to area UU congregations.

The Worship Associates are a force of continuity. The dozen members John Brancato, Lisa Galinski, Laurie Kelliher, Margaret Leicach, Doris Maldonado, Peter Meny, Judy Robbins, Rob Spector, Gretchen Spector, Carol Simpson, Sue Smolski and Rick Tsukada make up a wonderful team vested in the fabric of the USH worship service, each bringing an individual and distinct style to the tradition of our Sunday mornings together. Blessings and gratitude to each of their voices at USH.

Special thanks to Revs Cathy and Heather for creating this spiritual life in partnership. Just keep on keeping on.

Religious Education: (See report from our Director of Religious Education, Rayla Mattson included in this annual report). Rayla will provide specifics about activities this year as well as plans for the coming year. She has worked steadily at maintaining connections with our children and youth through online programs and activities and collaborating with other R.E. programs in UU congregations around the state.

Music: Sam Moffett, our Director of Music Ministry, has continued to provide rich and varied musical offerings which have complemented and enhanced our weekly services. Sam's considerable skill with technology has been well-used the past 15 months as we have worshipped online. We look forward to hearing him and the choir (alert, we need those voices) next Fall when we return to services in our Sanctuary.

SpiritLife: SpiritLife is an umbrella term for any spiritually-oriented program offered by the three area UU churches. These programs provide participants an opportunity to explore spirituality within a small group through readings, reflection, and discussion in small groups that meet throughout the year (September through June). The first nine-month SpiritLife class is winding up and will finish in early June. The timing was particularly fortuitous, as it filled a void during the Covid year when we were unable to see each other at church. These every-other-week meetings gave 30 UUs time to chew on significant topics with a group who became close over the year. The daytime groups considered such topics as: Gratitude; Acceptance; Interspirituality; Inspiration; and Contemplative Spirituality while the evening group also emphasized spiritual practices with practice partners. Spirit Friends, is a peer-led drop-in group that meets monthly to discuss a spiritual reading and attracts about 10-12 participants.

Next Fall, SpiritLife will present at least the following courses: Spirituality for UUs (this is the same as the 9-month course offered in 2020-21 but trimmed up to 12 weekly sessions). Spirituality for UUs will be open to new participants as will a course called Living Your Faith. For SpiritLife grads, there will be a course tentatively called Meetings With Spiritual Masters. We also are considering the following: Finding Spirituality in the 12 Steps; Walking the Buddhist 8-fold Path; Biblical Parables for UUs; and a course for UU ex-Catholics with Rev Joy Christi Przeworski, the assistant minister at Fern Street. The trustees are meeting May 8 and will come to a final slate at that time. Feedback forms for participants go out in the next week or two and we will have personal reports of the participants then.

The SpiritLife trustees (steering committee) consists of Judy Robbins, Rick Tsukada (facilitators of the day groups), Tom Gervais (night group facilitator) and Dave Gonci (founder of the national group, UU Mystics).

Chancel Art: Chancel Art is a group that contributes to weekly services by using flowers, fabric art, and other forms of art to enhance the visual impact of our chancel. This creative group has been on hold since online services began but they are eager to share their creativity in September.

### **Treasurer's Annual Report 2020-2021**

Bob Hewey, Treasurer

The budget through the end of the year is estimated to show a deficit of about \$10,000. To balance the budget, we will use some of our reserves. The recommend reserve to use in this case is the Prior Years' Carryover.

This year's pledges are anticipated to be short by \$40,000 out of a budgeted amount of \$314,000. However, some of this deficit was offset by payments of \$12,000 more than budgeted from previous year pledges.

The reduction in expenses adds up to about \$18,000. Much of this result from a reduction in utilities, office expenses and programs costs due to closing of the Meeting House due to Covid-19. For example, we requested and received a check for over \$2,800 from the company servicing the office printer/copier due to use much below the contracted amount. We also asked that the Knox Foundation pay for the water actually used in their community gardens which we supply. That came to over \$8,000. Details of these reductions are available in the budget summary to follow.

Some good news was that the total loan budgeted for this year and the next from the federal Paycheck Protection Program (approximately \$48,000) was converted to a grant.

Our budget for the next year will need to be conservative. We will have reserves to balance the budget but essential services and activities will need to be preserved as we plan to reopen to in-person gatherings in the Meeting House starting in the fall.

**Budget Summary: please see [ushartford.com/members/reports/May 2021](https://ushartford.com/members/reports/May%2021)  
Annual Report material for chart. *(To be provided by Brian Mullen)***