

# Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting November 14, 2023

Location: Zoom & USH Meeting House

Quorum NO \_\_\_ YES X

Board Attendees	Guests	Regrets
Dana Donovan	David Newton	
Nancy Kemmerer	Janice Newton	
Jon Covault	Laura Cipriano	
Rick Tsukada	Beverly Spence (Zoom)	
Gloria F. Mengual	Evan Williams (Zoom)	
Jim Venneman	Sherry Manetta	
Paul Cipriano		
Judy Sullivan		
Tina Davies		
Laurie Kelliher		
Rev. Bob Janis – Board Member, Ex Officio		

## Orders of Business

6:40 p.m. **Dana** - called the meeting to order. Check-in.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS/UPDATES \_\_\_\_\_

- I. **Approval of October 2023 Board Meeting Minutes** - Jim V. made **Motion to approve October Board meeting minutes. Jon C. seconded. Unanimous approval.**
  
- II. **Endowment Committee** – *David Newton*
  1. **Member nomination:** Joe Rubin expressed a willingness to serve a one-year term. David recommended his approval. *\*(See his bio in addendum below).* **Motion by Jim V.: That Board approved the addition of Joe Rubin to the Endowment Committee. Seconded: Tina. Vote: Unanimous.**

**2. Proposed policy changes regarding handling of endowment funds:** \*(See addendum below for detailed policy descriptions). The following policies adopted by the USH Board of Directors apply to gifts and donations to the USH Endowment and are intended to protect and maintain the Endowment to sustain USH into the future. All prior policies related to gifts and donations to the USH Endowment are repealed. Recommended policy changes:

- a. Unrestricted Memorial Gifts and Bequests**
- b. Other Unrestricted Gifts and Donations to the Endowment**
- c. Restricted Gifts and Donations**
- d. Administration of Funds**
- e. Endowment Gifts and Donations Reporting**

**Move to discuss:** Jim V. **Seconded:** Nancy K. Annual Endowment withdrawal for Operations and Capital Expenditures: Any disbursement from the Endowment will be made only upon approval of the Board. **Sherry M:** noted any amount less than \$10,000 went to operating fund. Now: Less than \$1,000 will go into operating fund. Board has power to accept or reject restricted gifts, limiting circumstances where future members are left with funds they cannot use due to restrictions. We will be encouraging people to be more explicit in their wills.

**Nancy:** for those giving smaller amounts, will they be recognized? Does this have to go to congregation for a vote? **Sherry:** No, this is solely a Board vote. **Jim:** one member wanted to support USH indefinitely; she gave less than \$500. It was anonymous. Once she dies, her name will be added to a recognition plaque. **Jon:** do we need more specificity when acknowledging family? **Rick:** Think it should be president of Board. **David:** letter of acknowledgement to memorial donation folk right now is sent by me; personalized. **Rick:** when we have an acknowledgement plaque, can we have a section named 'anonymous?' Group noted 'yes.' **Jim:** We should not set any minimum in order to be acknowledged.

**Jim – motion to approve endowment fund policy changes; Nancy seconded. Unanimous vote.**

### **III. Building & Grounds Updates** - David Newton

Rain situations – berm has worked successfully in front door area. This was a \$2,500 item. Status of pumps – need to change the backflow portion; it is not working. Camera system for security is working well.

North bay area that was experiencing leaking into kitchen is no longer leaking. Recent cleanup was successful.

**IV. Proposal to Reduce USH Contribution to UUA– Jim Venneman**  
*\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

The base the UUA used for legacy churches, based on a YouTube video, was \$1,752/member. USH has 136 members, with a budget per their definition for assessment purposes of \$324,941, or \$2,383/member. This is 36% higher than the \$1,752/member the UUA used several years ago. The percentage UUA uses in their calculation to determine each congregation's "share" is 6.75% (based on YouTube video). The USH Annual Report for 2021-2022 shows the certified membership to be 200 as of 2/1/21 in the Minutes of the previous Annual Meeting; the Secretary's report noted that number as well. The 2022-2023 Annual Report shows 136 members as of 2/1/23. Unless the 2023 certified membership number was used by the UUA, their calculation was way overstated.

Below I have calculated what I think our assessment might be. Other than the membership February 2023 number of 136, the figures are estimates:

- 136: 2/2023 Membership
- \$1,927: Estimated expense per member for legacy congregations. Instead of using the \$1,752/member they used several years ago, I increased it by 10% to account for inflation.
- 6.75%: The desired UUA percentage (*based on YouTube video*).

Calculation for UUA, based on above data:  $136 \times \$1.927 \times 0.0675 = \$17,690$

**USH Contribution to UUA Discussion: Jon:** We pay monthly: \$21,000 divided by 12. **Jim:** It's likely that a significant deficit is coming up at USH. We can't afford to maintain present amount designated to UUA. **Laurie** – USH congregation may not be aware of the advice we turn to the UUA for over time. **Rick** – There is strong indication that UUA has made momentous shift in their focus and how they want to spend their funds. Am not advocating either way. Some changes – number of ministers coming out of grad school is very low: five. Those graduating are looking to work in the community, not a

parish. The long term picture for USH: church is smaller, building getting older, stewardship funds are getting lower. As we look forward and see we can't afford it, what is our fiduciary responsibility? How do we maintain our finances so they remain as healthy as possible?

**Paul:** annual program fund goes to support congregations with programs/services. **Nancy:** We have seven months to go in this fiscal year. Our stewardship campaign fell short this year. The federal funds we received are covering this year's deficit; next year, without these fed funds, we will be in the hole. We have sent UUA twice what comparable churches of our size have sent. To send \$15,000 instead of \$22,000 still is something to be proud of. **Tina:** We need to mitigate expected reductions in income and budget so we in 2 – 5 years are not looking into an abyss. **Rev. Bob** – I didn't want to be first to speak. It's important to be transparent with UUA. The current USH '23/24 budget for UUA is \$21,738

**MOTION by Jim V: reduce USH contribution to UUA by \$7,000, which would bring the amount to \$14,738 for the current year. SECONDED: Tina VOTE: Nine in favor. One abstention.**

**V. Human Resource-related Issues - – Gloria F Mengual**

**a. HIPPA Training for USH Staff & Board**

While serving on the HR group designated with investigating tensions between USH staff and interim minister, multiple staff referred to discussions related to COVID vaccines. Gloria recommended that to ensure USH staff are complying with HIPAA guidelines, that they complete training in both HIPAA guidelines, as well as completing sexual harassment training – a norm at many places of employment. Dana offered to check into state video training options on these topics and their possible availability.

**Rev. Bob** – Agreed that it's a good idea for staff to complete a training about both HIPPA and sexual harassment. He recommended that the HR group identify video resources. **Action: HR subcouncil will check into trainings that are available and make recommendation of resources to the Board.**

**b. Policy to Clarify Board Role in HR Matters** – Gloria F Mengual. Have heard from multiple people during HR investigation into staff tensions conducted during April 2022 that at least two staff approached Board with complaints related to interim minister and nothing (that they know of) was done. No one from the Board communicated to them any updates, nor did they confirm that their expressed concerns were being addressed. This was part of the

reason that they turned to the UUA. GFM recommended that a policy be created that clarifies the Board's role in responding to any future concerns/complaints shared with them by USH staff, including the creation of incident reports.

**Judy:** We do need a policy in place to clarify things. **Dana:** We have a HR group now. They should look at the bylaws and bring back to Board recommendation on how to move forward. **Nancy:** There is quite a bit written in the bylaws. **Rick:** We need several types of report forms. There are none now. For example, child hurts himself; an incident report should be filled; a reported complaint that someone wants addressed. There should be a report created to capture that conversation as well. The reports will make it easier to have incidents move to the right person and will have maintained some accuracy as time passes and information is shared, rather than relying on recollection. **Laurie:** Having an incident report documents that person who expressed concern was heard, even if they remain feeling they have not really been heard.

**Rev. Bob-** The congregation is still healing from this experience. There was both an internal and external process; it was a difficult time; let's acknowledge the woundedness. **Dana –** We relied heavily on UUA during this time. We got a lot of guidance from them. When we first received internal HR investigative task force report, we were leaning toward taking internal task force's recommendations. When we heard further from UUA, we reconsidered and changed our recommendation vote. **Gloria –** I felt that the UUA overstepped their bounds. This should have been resolved internally. I don't want to look backward; my interest is in creating a policy that the Board will adhere to if USH staff approach them with concerns in the future, reducing the likelihood that staff take matters of concern outside of this congregation to be addressed. **Nancy-** I doubt if we will ever have a similar situation, **Laurie –** Our congregation has suffered multiple times through similar situations. **Rev. Bob –** there were lots of opinions and we can discuss moving forward with multiple perspectives. **Paul –** It's important to remember that multiple people felt they were not heard. **Laura C. –** Read aloud existing policy re: HR subcouncil – This is a very limited definition. The bylaws related to HR are limited. We do need an updated policy. **Rick-** How do we manage things needing to be addressed? My question is not limited just to complaints. How are member suggestions received? There is a distribution of responsibilities that the minister position has that we don't spend enough time considering. When we don't have a minister-what then? This is a good exercise – useful to reflect on. HR needs

some direction on this. **Nancy** – held up copy of USH HR policies. **Paul** – Existing USH HR policies contain much information on what to pay people and more. I suggest we make ourselves aware of policies and go along with them, and if we don't like them, change them, but consistently follow them. **Rick** – Another thing to consider is that these HR policies may have been written from context of a larger church. We need to revisit and review them. Will someone come up with an incident report? **Action: Laura C. offered to work on creation of incident report.** **Tina**- question about people feeling heard. Some have said they spoke with someone, but didn't feel heard. Sometimes it is a matter of the person hearing an answer that is not what they wanted. **Gloria:** The examples I shared earlier of staff was not that they did not feel heard; they clearly expressed there was no follow-up at all from the Board after they shared their concerns. **Dana – Recommendation** – have HR group review written policies and come back with recommendations. If Ron Sexton is willing to give feedback during this process, as he has expressed he is willing to do, that would be great.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

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**VI. MINISTER'S REPORT** - Rev. Bob Janis *\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

### **Sundays & Special Services**

Worship Associates - a joy to work with. Have met twice with the Youth Group during "Soup Sundays" -- an effort to foster connections between "what happens in RE" and "what happens in the Sanctuary." Healing is happening and needed on their part as well. I am planning to introduce an ongoing special evening service once a month in the chapel beginning first Thursday in January - more music, less words. We'll experiment and see how it goes.

**Programming and Social Justice** – *\*(See enclosed report)*

**Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage** – *\*(See enclosed report)*

**Minister's Discretionary Fund** – *\*(See enclosed report)*

**Foundations and Behind the Scenes** – *\*(See enclosed report)*

**VII. MORE UPDATES** – Nancy Kemmerer *\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

#### **a. Great Happenings at USH' Group Report**

Great Happenings is a long-term project that is already underway to make our church aesthetically representative of who we are. Project's

core group: Paula Bleck, Rick Tsukada, Evan Williams, and myself, Nancy Kemmerer.

**Overall Goals:**

1. To enhance our space, demonstrating love for this unique building
2. To make everyone feel welcome and comfortable
3. To make a space that attracts and holds the interest of the curious
4. To increase the possibility of rental opportunities

We had a very successful Clean-up Day on November 4<sup>th</sup>, where we concentrated on Fellowship Hall. Our first priorities are the Lobby and next will be the Library. Laurel, USH member who was a CT Library Association President, will be meeting with our group to discuss ways to enhance how library serves us. Some are simple projects...cleaning and repurposing rooms to meet today's congregational needs.

**b. National Registry of Historic Places**

Our petition is being considered and the conventional wisdom is that we will be granted a spot on the National Registry. This is a perfect opportunity to prepare for a grand celebration, beginning with September kickoff event. *\*(More details in addendum.)*

**VIII. Service Animals – Judy Sullivan** *\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

Trained service dogs are not the issue; emotional support animals are a whole other thing. Normally letter from doctor, psychologist, etc. is all that is needed. USH felt emotional support animal – if this is needed, should be allowed. The recommendation is that the person share a written request with Reverend and this would be allowed. We left out staff situations purposefully; we suggest those be handled on individual basis between staff person and minister. We say we are a welcoming congregation, so let's be welcoming.

Board discussed concerns expressed by members regarding the presence of dogs within USH building. Part of this involves the need for congregation education. **Rick** – I think what group suggests is just fine; it sets a standard, place to begin the conversation if needed. **Jon:** - having a form would be good for person with dog to fill noting their need and level of responsibility in relation to animal's conduct. Should we have designated area for people with allergies? **Tina:** It is important that the animal be leashed. **Motion:** Rick – that USH institute the policy as presented. **Jim V.** seconded. **Vote:** Eight in favor; two abstained.

**IX. COUNCIL CHAIR REPORTS**

**1. Administration Report-** *Paul Cipriano* – Security grant will come through soon. They are slow, but we will be reimbursed. *Meeting House Presents* folks are willing to help with improving our wireless system. We could probably do some sound improvement and it would cost us in the \$2,000 - \$3,000 range. We used their sound system, using blue tooth from a phone and their *Meeting House Presents* speakers. Sound was good. I asked them to give us an estimate for this sound system; this may increase our rentals. It is portable and can be moved downstairs or to the chapel. Concerts are being planned for next year. Past concerts have not yielded high attendance. Any help promoting the upcoming coffee house circuit folks we're hiring would be great. We are trying to maintain fair pay rate of \$200 per musician.

**2. Community Within Report-** *Tina Davies*

**3. Finance Report-** *Jon Covault* \*(See addendum below for complete report)

**The 2022-2023 budget:**

- **Final reconciliation of income and expenses for FY 2022-2023** - A modest surplus of \$11,552.17 which will be used to support the current budget year.
- **Pledges** - Current budget year ('23-24): Pledge-giving received as of Oct 30, 2023 was \$129,754 (pledges total \$279,135) – 46% of pledge total for first third of budget year. Higher than percent of pledges collected during same time frame last year.
- **Capital projects** – Security camera system \$12,964 expense for equipment, to be reimbursed from pending grant. Replacement of sewer pumps invoice will be paid from endowment funds. Cost of rain retention berm/pond recently enlarged to reduce risk of entrance flooding will be charged to B&G small projects budget.
- **Endowment** – \*(See enclosed addendum)
- **Schwab savings account** –Pre-paid pledges transferred to checking account in October. Interest income: \$424.

**4. Membership Report-** *Laurie Kelliher* \*(See addendum below for complete report)



A recent invitation by a Worship Associate during a service for any newcomers to rise and share their names received a robust response, with 5 people rising and 2 more waving. This welcoming practice will continue for the present. The need for congregational culture to respond with enhanced outreach to our visitors was discussed during the 11/12/23 Welcome group met 11/12/23, along with other recommendations. See addendum for details about:

- Encouraging visitors to the lobby welcome table
- Adding a second Welcome Table in Fellowship Hall
- Creating conversation tables downstairs in Fellowship Hall
- Developing info boards in Fellowship Hall
- Developing monthly "artificial" groups, identified by zip code, birthdays, etc.

Karolina is developing new pew cards with USH and brief UU info and brief UU info for visitors to peruse during event being attended. The new member ceremony has been celebrated in December and June. Rev. Bob is establishing his own approach to the holidays. Membership task force suggests new member ceremony be deferred until January, when it can receive more focus.

#### **5. Social Justice** – Judy Sullivan *\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

- The [EQUUAL ACCESS Disability Justice](#) group submitted a proposed policy regarding Service/Emotional Support Animals (ESA). This group is also scheduled to meet with Karolina to tour the building, reviewing all aspects of accessibility on USH grounds.
- [Race Matters](#) - Gloria Mengual collaborated with Tina Davies and Community Within on the Nov. 10 pizza and movie night to show and facilitate the James Baldwin movie, "I am not your Negro."
- The Sum of Us podcast discussions have been rescheduled to begin in January via Zoom on Thursday evenings. Marketing the program will begin in December.
- [Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry](#): Food donations have increased. The Winter Coat Drive has also been very successful.
- [Fern Street Food Ministry](#): The Backpack Program continues to add new students and comments from parents are positive.

#### **6. Spiritual Life** – Rick Tsukada *\*(See addendum below for complete report)*

- **Religious Education**

We are getting about ten consistent attendees on Sundays. Sometimes it jumps to 15 plus. Teaching staff is up and running; but could use some back-up volunteers. In conjunction with the Universal Church in West Hartford we have entered an agreement to produce an OWL program.

Planned RE youth monthly Sunday schedule:

1. Soup Sunday
2. Guest speaker from congregation
3. Attendance at adult service
4. Fourth Sunday (so far) is unplanned.

- **Music**

The plan is to invite guest musicians to be part of our services. We are in discussion for Sam to do a Workshop on music; he will be doing a music Sunday in December. Choir is now drop-in, aimed at people who prefer less rehearsal time and more musical enjoyment.

- **Worship Associate**

The melding of the work of our WA's and Rev. Bob is going really well. The WA's continue to be the prime producers of the high quality Off Sundays as part of our church's Shared Ministry Structure. The WA's are always looking for potential pulpit guests and more Worship Associates. Sue Smolski has been heading project of creating a Worship Associate Manual, which is nearing completion and reflects the new thinking of the Shared ministry.

- **Spirit Life Program**

This independent program, created in cooperation with both the UUSE and the Universalist Church of West Hartford, provides programming to the three congregations around more esoteric spiritual practices and study.

## **GUEST COMMENTS - None**

**MOTION TO ADJOURN – Dana: Motion to adjourn at 8:58 p.m: Gloria seconded motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn.**

**\*9:00 p.m. – Executive Board Meeting begins.**

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# **Addendums – November 2023 Reports**

**1.USH Ministerial November Board Report- Rev. Bob Janis**

*"November's grey makes apples redder seem;  
Makes fires seem brighter, and adds to their cheer.  
November days are lovely days, to me, -  
Grey, still, and chill – yet intimate and drear."*

- Mary Lawless

*Happy November! Thankful for all of your leadership*

### **Sundays & Special Services**

Settling into a rhythm on Sundays and trying out a few new things, too. Worship Associates have been a joy to work with. Met with the Youth Group on "Soup Sunday" and plan to again on this coming Sunday – good to foster those connections between "what happens in RE" and "what happens in the Sanctuary."

In January, planning to introduce a special evening service, more music, less words, happening the first Thursday of the month, 6-7 in the Chapel. We'll experiment with it and see how it goes.

### **Programming and Social Justice**

First Tuesday Discussions and Poetry Workshops have pretty good attendance. Robust discussion – looking for content for the year ahead. Signed up for GHIAA racial justice training, offered in January via Zoom. Sent out letters regarding environmental initiatives. Excited about the "Sum of Us" podcast and other social justice initiatives ongoing.

### **Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage**

Thornburg, Greenbaum, Spence, funerals added to the many dear members who have left us recently, and are remembered daily in various ways. Making visits here and there – getting a few more demands on my time now that I've been in post a little while and am a known quantity. I'm always delighted to meet with folks; it's just a matter of organizing the various meetings and, where time is limited, prioritizing. Getting Minister's Discretionary Fund checkbook – guidance or suggestions always helpful. I recognize it's at my discretion by definition, and confidential; still, it's the congregation's money, not mine, and so looking over past precedent and policy.

### **Foundations and Behind the Scenes**

Good to get staff meetings ongoing now. Discussed SMART goals with program staff.

Lots of good, informal conversations about directions this congregation might go, in terms of programming, staff development, use of our building, etc. Haven't started any formal visioning work yet; think it's good for people

to just feel a little confidence and comfort in where we are now. But some light is visible beyond the autumn mists...

## **2. Nomination to Endowment Committee – David Newton, Chair**

### **Appointment of Joseph Rubin to a one-year term on the Endowment Committee beginning on July 1, 2023**

**Whereas**, Joe Rubin is well qualified \*(see associated bio below) for appointment to the Endowment Committee and

**Whereas**, He has indicated a willingness to serve USH in this capacity for a one-year term, now therefore, be it

**Resolved**, that the Board herewith appoints Joe Rubin to a one-year term on the Endowment Committee with a start date of July 1, 2023, concurrent with the beginning of the fiscal year.

*Joe Rubin and his wife, Diane Cadrain, have been USH members for over 35 years. During that time he has served as a member of the Board, its president, member and chair of the Religious Education Committee, and volunteer or member of many other USH projects. His adult children all grew up at USH. Joe retired about a year and half ago from a long legal career, including 36 years as a litigator and executive staff member with the Connecticut Attorney General. He now enjoys spending more time with his wife, children and grandchildren, traveling some, and doing volunteer legal work on behalf of children. He is willing to join the Endowment Committee to assist in its stewardship.*

Your consideration of the recommendation is deeply appreciated.

David Newton, Chair, Endowment Committee

## **3. Proposed Policies Re: Handling of Endowment Funds - David Newton, Chair**

### **Resolution on Proposed Endowment Policies**

**Whereas**, The Endowment Committee has considered past policies governing the Endowment, and

**Whereas**, There have been various positive and negative reactions to various past policies, and

**Whereas**, Administration of the proposed Policies will be clear and to the advantage of USH financial affairs, now, therefore, be it

**Resolved**, That the proposed policies below are herewith adopted by the Board on November 14, 2023.

The following policies adopted by the USH Board of Directors apply to gifts and donations to the USH Endowment and are intended to protect and maintain the Endowment to sustain USH into the future. The implementation of these policies is a responsibility of the USH Board of Directors in accordance with the USH Constitution and By-laws which, along with Connecticut regulations, govern the USH Endowment. All prior policies related to gifts and donations to the USH Endowment are repealed.

**Unrestricted Memorial Gifts and Bequests** - Unrestricted memorial gifts and bequests of \$1,000 or more, unless otherwise specified by the donor, shall be deposited to the Endowment as soon as reasonably possible after receipt. Such funds shall be considered part of the general unrestricted portion of the Endowment. Amounts less than \$1,000 may be deposited in the Operating Account. Whenever the Board, the President or the Treasurer is uncertain as to where a donor intended a memorial gift or bequest to be deposited, they shall attempt to ask the donor for their intention in writing. If they are unable to receive that information, then the policies herein shall control.

**Other Unrestricted Gifts and Donations to the Endowment** - Other gifts and donations designated for the Endowment by the donor will be deposited to the Endowment as soon as reasonably possible after receipt. Such funds will be considered part of the general unrestricted portion of the Endowment if not otherwise restricted by the donor.

**Restricted Gifts and Donations** - A restricted gift or donation, whether a memorial gift or bequest, or any other gift or donation, must be accepted by the Board for its intended purpose after the Board has determined that USH has the capacity and the intent to honor the restriction. The Board will ensure that the terms of the restriction are documented in writing. Such funds will be deposited to a restricted account in the Endowment as soon as reasonably possible, or otherwise accounted for as restricted.

The board shall make reasonable attempts to limit a restriction to ten years or less, after which the gift or donation would be deemed unrestricted. Any time limitations must be agreed to in writing by the donor. At any point in time, restrictions can be released by the donor or the donor's successor or legal representative in writing to the President of the Board.

**Administration of Funds** - For administrative or other purposes, all gifts or donations, whether memorial gifts and bequests of \$1,000 or more or any other gift or donation, may first be deposited in the Brokerage Account (e.g., to sell securities) or in the Operating Account, before being transferred in a reasonable amount of time to the Endowment.

**Endowment Gifts and Donations Reporting** - The Endowment Committee will ensure that reports on Endowment gifts and donations are reported at least quarterly by the Treasurer or the Finance Committee Council Chair. An acknowledgement of the gift or donation will be sent by the board to the donor or the family of the deceased in whose memory the gift or donation is made as soon as practically possible.

**Annual Endowment Withdrawal for Operations and Capital Expenditures** - Annually, as of December 31, the Endowment Committee will calculate and recommend to the Board a prudent amount to be withdrawn from the Endowment to support the following year's annual operating budget and miscellaneous capital expenditures (up to a total of \$10,000). The recommendation will be based on a calculation, as of the most recent December 31, that multiplies the average unrestricted assets for the last thirteen quarter-ends by a prudent percentage such as 4.0% to 4.5%. The amount to be withdrawn, if any, from the endowment to support the annual budget will consider best practices, the current and recent rate of inflation, CT endowment laws and regulations, and endowment restrictions outlined in the USH Constitution and By-laws.

**Disbursements from the Endowment** - Any disbursement from the Endowment will be made only upon approval of the Board. Board considerations will include:

- The Constitution/By-law stipulation that the Endowment will be maintained at a level "not less than two times the actual annual operating expenditures".
- The importance of an annual withdrawal from the Endowment to support the operating budget and small capital projects each year. This withdrawal is typically considered to be calculated at a rate less than inflation and as described above.
- Donor restrictions.
- The needs of USH.

#### **4.Proposal to Reduce USH Contribution to UUA – *Jim Venneman***

A review of the current year's budget shows it is balanced because it includes \$22,000 in prior year carryover and \$41,120 from the Payroll Protection Program. This \$63,000 is unlikely to be available next year. We must prioritize our expenditures now to prepare for the future.

I have already talked with several other Board members. They agree we should have this discussion now. While the Board as a group needs to discuss what change, if any, in what we send to the UUA is appropriate, I

am recommending a reduction of \$7,000 this year. I base this on the following:

- The current budget includes \$21,738 for the UUA based on its "Fair Share" guidelines. A reduction of \$7,000 means USH would still be sending \$14,738 or 68% of the request.
- The UUA shows USH as having 136 members. On a per capita basis, a \$14,738 contribution would still be \$108 per member.
- The UUA FY23 budget shows \$7,265,000 on the "Annual Program Fund" line. I believe the UU membership is about 150,000. If so, the average per person contribution is only \$48. Thus, USH is still contributing over twice the average on a per capita basis.
- I looked up the list of "Honor Congregations" in Connecticut, which are the ones the UUA says send the requested amount. There are 18 congregations of all types in Connecticut. Seven are listed as Honor Congregations. My guess is that USH and UUSE may be the only churches, with the others being fellowships. I base this on USH and UUSE having 136 and 294 members, respectively; while the others have between 9 and 22. Small congregations or fellowships are unlikely to have buildings, much in the way of staff expense, etc. With the UUA now determining the "Fair Share" request as a percentage of the operating budget, it is very easy for congregations with minimal fixed expenses to send the full request.

In the long run, I think it is more important for USH to use the \$7,000 to continue to build the USH community. Even with this reduction in the amount being sent to the UUA, we are still more than twice as generous on a per capita basis. We should be proud that we feel we can send \$14,738.

### **5.Great Happenings at USH - Project already underway to make our church aesthetically representative of who we are** – *Nancy Kemmerer*

I want to introduce you to a long-term project that is already underway to make our church aesthetically representative of who we are. This project will address practical issues as well as presenting us in the very best possible light.

The **project core group**: Paula Bleck, Rick Tsukada, Evan Williams, and myself, Nancy Kemmerer. We represent a number of relevant stake holders in the church, Spirit Life, Building and Grounds, Chancel Arts, The Artists Way, Worship Associates and the Board. When a project is being considered, the group will engage specific groups/teams within USH and their talents to help with work on each project. For instance, we are looking to improve the

look and function of our lobby and we are talking with Membership, Welcoming, Security, and B&G groups about this.

Some of the projects are simple...cleaning rooms of clutter; repurposing rooms to be more useful spaces to meet the needs of today's congregation. This also includes aesthetic components - making the space a more beautiful and pleasing one in which to work and worship. In short, to renovate our space to be more beautiful and effective in supporting our life together as a caring, loving community that we want to share with others to enhance the quality of our lives together.

The group will keep the Board and all interested parties apprised of our work. Currently, our first priorities are the Lobby and the Library.

Goals:

7. To enhance and update our space that demonstrates our love for this unique building
8. To make everyone feel welcome and comfortable
9. To make a space that attracts and holds the interest of the curious
10. To increase the possibility of rental opportunities

We had a very successful Clean-up Day on November 4<sup>th</sup>, where we concentrated on Fellowship Hall. There will be more opportunities for involvement as our projects move forward.

### **National Registry of Historic Places**

Our petition is being considered and the conventional wisdom is that we will be granted a spot on the National Registry. This is a significant designation and the evaluation takes time but a decision should be made by this summer.

This is a perfect opportunity to prepare for a grand celebration. Some thoughts:

- Designate a specific date in the fall
- Ask the Mayor to present the certificate to Rev. Bob at a Sunday service
- Give docent tours
- Host a luncheon
- Media coverage



- Short 10-minute film on who we are
- Hold an Open House each Saturday for the month

Now is the time to start organizing for an amazing celebration in the Fall.

## **6. Treasurer Report – Jon Covault**

### **2022-2023 budget:**

**Final reconciliation of income and expenses for FY 2022-2023** - A modest surplus of \$11,552.17 which will be used to support the current budget year. This net surplus included unbudgeted expenses of \$3,000 to complete the sanctuary lighting and \$3,604 remaining costs for completing the carpet installation in spring of 2022. It also reflected a 75% reduced use of endowment funds compared with original budget.

**Pledges** - Current budget year (23-24): Pledge giving received as of Oct 30, 2023 was \$129,754 (pledges total \$279,135) or 46% of pledge total received for first third of budget year. For prior budget year, giving received as of Oct 30, 2022 was \$116,148 (pledges \$297,800) or 39% of pledged amount during 33% of year.

**Capital projects** – Security camera system \$12,964 expense for equipment, reimbursement from state grant has been requested by Paul Cipriano. Replacement of sewer pumps and affiliated equipment is near completion and invoice anticipated in November, endowment funds will be used to pay for this capital expense. The rain retention berm/pond adjacent to handicapped parking recently enlarged in size/depth to reduce risk of entrance flooding – cost will be charged to B&G small projects budget line item.

**Endowment** - \$100 in endowment memorial gifts received in October. Withdrawals for October were the monthly support of our annual budget (\$4,454) and the quarterly 1% investment management fee.

**Schwab savings account** – Transfer of remaining pre-paid pledges to the checking account completed in October. Interest income of \$424.

## **7. Membership Report – Laurie Kelliher**

At the last BOD Meeting we discussed newcomers to USH and Jon Covault recalled that in the past the Worship Associate (WA) in the pulpit invited

newcomers to rise and tell their names or to give a wave. At the request of the last minister this practice was dropped. The possibility of re-adopting the practice was then discussed at the next WA meeting and a trial was suggested. The following Sunday there was a robust response with 5 people rising and 2 more waving. This welcoming practice will continue for the present.

Congregational culture now needs to respond with enhanced outreach to our visitors. The Welcome team met 11/12/23 and discussed the next actions.

- Continue to encourage visitors to the lobby welcome table and sign the brief welcome form (name, email) which is used by Rev Bob who sends a welcome greeting to new visitors and by Laurie Kelliher to invite visitors to First Connections.
- Add a second Welcome Table in Fellowship Hall for more leisurely chats and another opportunity to gather visitor info (name/email)
- Create conversation tables which might be posted with particular topics.
- Develop info boards in Fellowship Hall (perhaps building history, USH history) where a visitor might go if feeling adrift.
- Monthly "artificial" groups identified by...

zip code  
birthday month or Zodiac sign  
faith of family of origin or none  
Other suggestions?

The Meeting House is used for multiple rentals and concerts and ceremonies. Karolina is developing new pew cards on stiffer stock (no more flopping over) with USH info and brief UU info that people in the pews might browse while awaiting the start of an event or concert, during intermission, (boredom) with the hope of sprinkling curiosity about UUs and USH. Karolina is also working to develop the card with a QR code which directs visitors to add contact information.

The new member ceremony has been celebrated in December and June. This December is our first with a Rev Bob who will be establishing his own approach to the holidays. Suggest the new member ceremony be deferred until January when it can receive more focus. Hopefully three new members will be added to the roles.

## **8. Social Justice Council Report – Judy Sullivan**

The EQUUAL ACCESS Disability Justice group met, researched and submitted a proposed policy regarding Service/Emotional Support Animals (ESA). It was sent to the board via email for discussion and editing on Nov. 5. A copy of the proposal is attached.

This group is also scheduled to meet with Karolina next week to tour the building, reviewing all aspects of accessibility:

- Parking
- Lighting
- Interior Movement
- Entryway
- Signage
- Grounds/Outside

#### Race Matters:

- Gloria Mengual collaborated with Tina Davies and Community Within on the Nov. 10 pizza and movie night. The James Baldwin movie, "I am not your Negro" was chosen and Gloria gave some opening remarks and then led a discussion following the movie.
- The Sum of Us podcast discussions, also led by Gloria Mengual, have been rescheduled to begin in January via Zoom on Thursday evenings. Marketing the program will begin in December, and will include the community at large.

Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry: Food donations have increased and are greatly appreciated. The Winter Coat Drive has also been very successful, and timely, with cold weather arriving.

Fern Street Food Ministry: The Backpack Program continues to add new students and comments from parents are positive. A personal note: my grandson, Ruben, was visiting me for a week this summer and helped pack the special diet backpacks with us on our usual Wednesday. He has been helping in the Great Barrington Food Pantry and he noticed that kids were disappointed when there were no snack foods for them to choose. So, his Bar Mitzvah project was collecting snack foods to donate – and he was very successful!

Crisis Services card - distributed to Caring Network, Disability Justice groups

### **Policy regarding Service/Emotional Support Animals**

The EqUual Access subgroup of the Social Justice Council was asked to research policies regarding the presence of service animals and emotional support animals at services and other USH events. The goal was to come up

with a policy that the Social Justice Council could present to the USH board for consideration.

**A bit of background:** USH is a religious entity, and as such, is exempt from the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). All our programs, including services, are exempt, even those to which the general public is invited. However, USH is still committed to following the spirit of the ADA. Its principles comport with our own---of being inclusive and respectful of all individuals.

As is true of all policies, we must reach a balance between those who need to bring their animals to services and programs, and other congregants who may be afraid of animals, vulnerable to tripping on them, or allergic to them. Some may also find them disruptive of worship.

We are discussing two types of animals: 1) service animals; and 2) emotional support animals (ESAs). The ADA defines service animals as 'dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.' Service dogs undergo rigorous training to perform these specific tasks for the disabled person. According to the ADA, service dogs must be accommodated. A service dog may go any place where the public is allowed to go.

An ESA gives support to individuals with qualifying mental disorders, for example, anxiety, depression, and certain phobias. In most states, including Connecticut, a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist must determine that the presence of an animal is needed for the mental health of the patient. ESAs are not service dogs, and ESA users do not receive the same accommodations as service dog users. Neither are ESAs specifically trained. An ESA may be of any age and any breed. The ADA clearly states that animals that only provide emotional support do not qualify as service animals.

Besides these two legal categories, the terms 'therapy dogs' and 'comfort animals' are also used. A therapy dog usually is trained to go into settings like schools or nursing homes to bring joy to those who need it. A comfort animal is basically a pet. These two categories are not usually the subject of church policies, except to the degree that comfort animals, or pets, are generally excluded.

**The strict 'service dog only' approach:** We discovered that some UU churches take a strict approach and permit only service dogs on church premises. (Anecdotally, based on policies posted online, perhaps a third of

the UU churches take this approach.) This strict approach is consistent with the ADA. Here is an example of such an approach:

*Unitarian Universalism is an inclusive faith, and the presence of pets excludes the interests of those who have allergies, fears, or phobias surrounding animals. There are also legal and safety considerations for limiting pets. Church is designed for people. Therefore, with the exception of service animals, the annual Animal Blessing Service and any outdoor service, no animals are allowed in the Meeting House of the Marquette Unitarian Universalist Congregation.*

**More liberal policies---`service animals and ESAs permitted`:** The majority of the UU congregations that posted policies online rejected the strict `service dog only` approach, allowing ESAs under certain circumstances. Those circumstances varied widely, as did the procedures for determining when it would be appropriate to allow an ESA or ask an ESA to leave the premises. Some included extensive notice provisions and byzantine procedures. None of the policies allowed congregants to bring comfort animals, or pets, into the building.

**We believe the inclusion of prescribed ESAs should be adopted by USH and propose the following policy as a starting point for your discussion.**

USH seeks to be inclusive and welcoming to all persons, including those with disabilities or mental disorders. To that end, USH will permit the presence of service animals and emotional support animals. For the safety and comfort of all attending services and other events at USH, however, we adopt the following guidelines:

### **Service animals**

- Service animals, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), are welcome in all church spaces. Service animals are permitted to go anywhere the public may go.
- Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's tasks on behalf of the disabled person.
- The presence of a service animal in the building should be shared with the congregation with a reminder that the service animal is at work and should not be disturbed.

### **Emotional support animals**

- Emotional support animals are welcome. Connecticut law requires that a health care provider---a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist---prescribe an emotional support animal.

- Any person who wants to bring an emotional support animal into the building must first meet with the minister or person designated by the minister to assess any safety issues or dangers the animal might pose. If there are any known concerns, the animal will not be allowed in the building.
- Emotional support animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered at all times, and under the control of the person who brought the animal.
- If any emotional support animal becomes disruptive, or engages in unsafe or threatening behavior, the owner must remove it immediately from church property.
- Owners are responsible for any damage caused by the emotional support animal.

We hope this has been helpful and look forward to working with the Board on refining the policy.

## **9. Spiritual Life Council Report – Rick Tsukada**

In general it seems that we are getting up to speed after what may feel as years of dealing with major changes. We have a very engaged Minister in Rev. Bob, we have an Administrator, Karolina, who has become a dependable and effective wheel hub and Kevin who shows up and things get done and then he disappears until the next day....Things are getting up to speed.

The Spirit Life of this church, is truly humming along and gathering force and depth.

### General Reports:

#### Religious Education

We are getting about ten consistent attendees on Sundays. Sometimes it jumps to 15 plus. They are divided by 5 in each "age group" the 9 through 12 and below 12.

The teaching staff is up and running but could use some additional volunteers as back ups.

In conjunction with the Universal Church in West Hartford we have entered an agreement to produce an OWL program. To date we have sent our Youth Group Teacher, Paula Matzke to become a certified trainer and the program is slated to begin in late Jan. or early Feb.

In general the schedule is: one Sunday is Soup Sunday...one Sunday is for discussion that will utilize guest speakers from the congregation...one Sunday is for attendance to our adult services. As of now the fourth Sunday

is unplanned. Arts and Crafts are part of the programming especially for the younger kids.

The expansion of the RE program to include Adult Religious Education is slowly evolving and the groups offered by Rev. Bob are a good indication of a growing presence of that development as well as the adjunct work of the Spirit Life group.

A revised Employment contract for the RE Coordinator (Annie Witzler) is close to being completed.

Music:

This is to some extent a very visible aspect of the council work. Some not so obvious though is that the coordination and "relationship" with Rev Bob is going very well and my comment is that with Sam's improvisational musicianship the style of Rev Bob's creative juices we are in for some really great services as that partnership deepens.

I am, along with Sam, beginning to identify what one can call, guest musicians to become part of our Services. They will, like our congregational pulpit guests, enhance our capacity of both include and appreciate the talents of more of our members.

We are also in discussion for Sam to do a Workshop on music...he was and is a composer and his creativity is more that obvious and we might benefit from his way of thinking and understanding music He will be doing a music Sunday in December and that is a treat and inspiring..

Ad: Our choir is now a drop in design and it is aimed at people who just like to sign and would like to do so in a group....with minimal rehearsal time and is aimed at musical enjoyment.

Worship Associates:

Once again it is notable to say that the melding of the work of our WA's and Rev. Bob is going really well. The emerging results that are seen on Sunday's is a good indicator of how the style of the WA's and the minister is developing. The WA's continue to be the prime producers of the Off Sundays as part of the Shared Ministry Structure of our Church. Those Off Sunday Services continues to be of the highest quality. and contribute to the on going development of our church as a community. The WA's are always looking for potential pulpit guests and of course we could always use a few more Worship Associate

It is notable that Sue Smolski has been heading up a long term project of creating a Worship Associate Manual and it is nearing the end stage of this project which has taken a number of years and reflects the new thinking of the Shared ministry.

**Spirit Life Program:**

This is an independent program, that was created over six years ago in cooperation with both the UUSE and the Universalist Church of West Hartford to provide programming to the three congregations around more esoteric spiritual practices and study. They continue to produce mostly discussion and have recently produce an in person workshop on "spiritual resting".