

USH ANNUAL REPORT 23'-24'



Unitarian Society of Hartford
July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024



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Annual Meeting Agenda

The Unitarian Society of Hartford, May 19, 2024, 12 pm.

In Person and via Zoom

Introduction

Nancy Kemmerer, *President-Elect*

Opening Words, Greeting, and Message

Dana Donovan, *President*

Report from our Secretary and Approval of Last Year's Minutes

Gloria Francesca Mengual, *Secretary*

Minister's Message to the Congregation

Reverend Bob Janis – Reflections and Aspirations

Our Summer Schedule of Services

Sue Smolski, *Worship Associates Coordinator*

Highlights from 2023-2024/ Priorities for 2024-2025

David Newton, *Building and Grounds*

Paul Cipriano, *Council on Administration* - Projects and Grant Updates

Tina Davies, *Council on Community Within*

Rick Tsukada, *Council on Spiritual Life* - Music and RE Programs

Laurie Kelliher, *Council on Membership*

Stewardship and Our Budget

Jim Venneman, *Council on Finance*

Jon Covault, *Treasurer*

Congregation Voting

On Article II at the UUA General Assembly

On our slate of nominations for the Board of Directors

Nancy Kemmerer – President

Nina Elgo – President-Elect

Jonathan Covault – Treasurer

Paul Cipriano – Chair of the Council on Administration

Laura Cipriano – Chair of the Council of Community Within

Jim Venneman – Chair of the Council on Finance

Members of the Board in midterm

Gloria Francesca Mengual – Secretary

Laurie Kelleher – Chair of the Council on Membership

Judy Sullivan – Chair of the Council on Social Justice

Rick Tsukada – Chair of the Council on Spiritual Life

Volunteer Recognition Awards

Dana Donovan, *President*

Closing Benediction

Rev. Bob Janis

Proposed Slate for the Board

The Nominating Committee has provided the following slate of nominations for the Board of Directors, to be voted on at the Annual Meeting on May 19, 2024. The Nominees are:

President – Nancy Kemmerer for a one-year term 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2025

President-Elect – Nina Elgo for a one-year term 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2025

Treasurer – Jon Covault for a two-year term 07.07.2024 to 6.30.2026

Chair, Council of Administration – Paul Cipriano for a two-year term 07.01.2024 to 6.30.2026

Chair, Council of Community Within – Laura Cipriano for a two-year term 07.01.2024 to 6.30.2026

Chair, Council on Finance – Jim Venneman for a one-year term 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2025

Note: In addition to the above nominees for open positions, the 2024/25 USH Board will also include the following current board members who have completed the first year of their respective two-year terms:

Secretary – Gloria Francesca Mengual for a two-year term 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025

Chair, Spiritual Life – Rick Tsukada for a two-year term 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025

Chair, Social Justice Council – Judy Sullivan for a two-year term 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025

Chair, Council on Membership – Laurie Kelliher for a two-year term 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025

Nancy Kemmerer (President, Term: 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2025) Nancy first attended USH in 2018. She knew immediately she wanted to become a member of this welcoming, vibrant, talented and liberal congregation. Nancy grew up in Bennington VT where she met her husband Stan in Sunday School. She lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, working for IBM in various management positions for 20 years. Her last position was Area Security Manager for the 11 Western States. Stan and Nancy married in 2000 and now live in Burlington. Nancy enjoys traveling, reading, and being with her friends at Lunch Bunch, Pizza and a Movie, Caring Network, Yoga, UUSpirit Life, Connection Circle and Sunday services.

Nina Elgo (President-Elect, Term 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2025) Since joining USH in the early 1990's, Nina has served on the Board, the ministerial search committee, the Religious Education Committee, teaching the middle school and working with the high school youth group. Most recently, she served as Parliamentarian for the UUA's General Assembly from 2016-2023. She has been a judge on the Connecticut Appellate Court since 2017 and a superior court judge since 2004. She has served on the Board of Playhouse on Park, and over the years, housed over 30 actors from all over the country for their productions. She loves theater, hiking, gardening, photography and reading.

Jon Covault (Treasurer, Term: 7.01.2024 to 6.30.2026) 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 12 years he and his husband Michael have attended the Unitarian Society of Hartford where he was the Administration Council chair for 2 years and for the past 2 years Treasurer. 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 Josie.

Paul Cipriano (Chair, Administration Council, Term: 7.01.2022 to 6.30.2024) Paul was born and raised in Connecticut. Paul met his wife Laura while attending Central Connecticut State University. They have two children, Catharine and Diana, now grown. Paul works in marketing for Cumberland Farms and when he is not working enjoys reading, gardening and trying to play guitar. Music has been an important part of Laura and Paul's married life. They have volunteered together at many different music festivals including Clearwater and Falcon Ridge. They volunteered and served on the board of directors for The Sounding Board Coffeehouse in West Hartford. Since joining USH, Paul and Laura have been co-chairs of Meeting House Presents which is in its 4th season.

Jim Venneman (Chair of proposed Finance Committee, Term: 7.01.2023 - 6.30.2024) Ellie and I joined USH in the late 1980s, I was on the Board throughout the 1990s, as a Board member, Vice President, President, and Treasurer. After a long rest from leadership positions, I was Chair of the Endowment Committee from 2014 to 2017. Ellie and I had a great time when we taught the Polliwogs (what the Sunday School class for 3-year-olds was then called) for about 15 years. I have also enjoyed my association with the Building and Grounds group at USH. Ellie and I find many of our current friends are people we met through USH.

Listed below is the current Board member whose 2nd contiguous term continues until 2025:

Gloria Francesca Mengual (Secretary, Term: 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025) Gloria is the Diversity & Inclusion Specialist for the Capitol Region Education Council's Open Choice program. She provides professional development sessions to educators and youth in many of the 27 school districts that accept Hartford youth into their school systems, in the hope of reducing the inequities they experience while attending suburban schools. Previously, she was a program officer for the Paul J. Aicher Foundation's Everyday Democracy program, where she worked with communities to address challenges through large-scale dialogues that included diverse residents' voices and actions, with the goal of impacting public policy. She provided technical assistance throughout the country in community organizing, dialogue facilitation and action idea implementation. Gloria joined USH 8 years ago and served on the USH board as the chair of social justice for two years. She has facilitated race dialogues and storytelling sessions at USH, co-facilitated Beloved Conversations, and when COVID hit, facilitated via Zoom multiple discussions, based on reading and/or listening to the 1619 Project podcasts. When she is not at work, she enjoys gardening, reading, attending theatre, hiking, hanging out at the beach and spending time with her daughter, Sam, and Sam's husband, David, at their home in Gorham, ME. So far, she is 'grandmother' to their German Shephard and hopes that someday, the grandchild list will grow to a two-legged critter.

Rick Tsukada (Chair of Spiritual Life, 7.01.2023 - 6.30.2025) Rick Tsukada is a lifelong Unitarian, growing up in the White Plains (NY) Unitarian Church. He was a national Unitarian youth leader in LRY (Liberal Religious Youth). He has also been active at UU Rowe Camp in the Berkshires. After an early career as a lighting designer for theater, dance and rock performances, Rick became a social worker and psychotherapist, finishing his career at Middlesex Hospital. Upon retirement he joined USH and has served as a Worship Associate most of that time. Rick is a big picture, often out of the box, thinker and a creative spirit.

Judy Sullivan (Chair, Social Justice Council, Term 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025) Judy moved to CT from MA in 2013 and now lives in West Hartford. She has a BA from Wilkes University and received her RN from Albany Medical Center School of Nursing. She is a past board member for United Way, former state representative for National Patient Advocacy Foundation, lobbying on state and federal levels for healthcare issues, and past board member for PA Oncology Hematology Management Society. She has been a foster child care program volunteer mentor and volunteer for Hospice at Hebrew Healthcare. Judy has five children and eight grandchildren in four states, and one small dog who thinks he is an only child. Judy is currently on the USH Welcoming Team and the Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Committee. She has served as chair of the Council on Social Justice for one year now, and is nominated to serve a second term.

Laurie Kelliher (Chair, Council on Membership: Term: 7.01.2023 to 6.30.2025) Laurie was born to two Unitarians and she and her husband Andy Obelnicki raised two children at USH. Laurie is a retired PA (Physician Associate) and worked for 40 years in pediatrics in Hartford. She arrived in Hartford in 1978 and attended USH sporadically at first, but when her children came along, she and Andy became involved in RE. They taught the same group of kids from time they were in 3rd grade until they graduated to the Youth Group. They then taught OWL for several years. Laurie has been a Worship Associate for many years and has chaired the team for several terms. She now sits on the BOD as the Chair of Membership. She is a proselytizing UU and happy to spread the word.

Annual Meeting May 21, 2023 Review

Submitted by Sarah McKenzie, Secretary

USH Annual Meeting – May 21, 2023

12:16 – Meeting called to order; Dana Donovan made an introduction with some history of the past two years.

12:22 – Opening words, greeting, and message from Eve Pech

12:32 – Secretary’s Report – Approval of last year’s Annual Meeting Minutes – Larry Lunden made the motion, Dana Donovan Seconded the motion. Voice vote was overwhelmingly in favor.

12:34 – Sue Smolski gave an update on Summer Services and additions and updates to the Worship Associate group.

12:37 – David Newton gave an update on Building and Grounds for the upcoming year

12:40 – Paul Cipriano gave an update on the Safety/Security Grant – Keyless entry, cameras, doorbell camera, and monitor in the office.

12:44 – Tina Davies gave an update on Community Within

12:47 – Peter Meny gave an update on Music and RE (via zoom)

12:55 – Jon Covault gave an update on the budget.

1:00 – Carolyn Carlson gave an update on Stewardship.

1:02 – Congregational Voting

- Vote to allow membership voting via zoom (only members present at USH voting on this item)
- Joe Rubin made the motion to interpret the word “present” to include members attending via electronic means, Ray Pech seconded. Unanimously approved.
- Motion carries, 0 nays, 0 abstentions
(need zoom votes for the remainder of the votes)
- Vote to make permanent the “Share the Plate” for Good Neighbor Offerings
- Motion made by Bob Hewey; Fred Lewis seconded. Unanimously approved.
- Motion carries, 0 nays, 0 abstentions
- Vote in re: Article II Revision Advancement. Some discussion ensued.
- Vote taken by paper ballot No – 40, Yes – 13
- Vote on Changes to the USH Constitution:
- Eve made the motion to accept the full slate of changes without exception, Carolyn Carlson seconded. Discussion ensued.
- 2 nay votes, no abstentions, Motion carries
- Vote to approve Board Slate with the two additional Board Positions
- Sue Tenorio made the motion, Diana Heyman seconded.
- Unanimously approved, 0 nays, 0 abstentions

1:26 – Volunteer Recognition Awards – Entire Worship Associates Group

1:31 – Meeting adjourned

President's Report

Dana Donovan

It has been an amazing year at USH! After three years of what I would describe as surviving (though with great efforts from many volunteers), we have turned a corner and have seen a year of hope, joy, love, and growth. I think we can all agree that much of this has to do with Reverend Bob Janis' ministry. He has brought new energy and ideas to the meetinghouse, like a breath of fresh spring air and sunshine after being cooped up for a long dull winter. This energy and hope can be seen reflected in the faces and attitudes of everyone you encounter in the meetinghouse. People are smiling. People are talking. And more and more people are coming to USH: both new faces and ones we haven't seen since Covid. The blue boat home is sailing along with a favorable wind at its back!

Of course, all the accomplishments of the last year are not the work of one man. So many people have worked hard and long hours to make all the changes happen. The Worship Associates have continued to provide excellent pulpit support and guidance, both when Rev Bob preaches and when we are graced with the many pulpit guests. The wide variety of services makes you look forward to Sunday mornings as you are never sure what it will be like, but there is always something worth looking forward to.

So many thanks must go to the Building & Grounds Committee and staff. The meetinghouse is looking better and better every day. The list of accomplishments over the last year goes on and on, from the new paving to the cleaned roof, new toilets, new sump pumps, improved drainage around the building, and so much more. I'm sure David Newton will have an excellent report about it all. I would like to personally thank David and Kevin Girouard, our sexton, for their hard work. Three other subgroups of B&G deserve recognition. The first is the Security committee, led by Laura and Paul Cipriano, who have worked diligently to secure grants to finance the improvements to the building security and will continue to do so. The second is the committee seeking to obtain the Historical Register of Historic Places designation for the meetinghouse, led by Toni Gold. Thanks to their hard work we are pretty certain that we will obtain that designation soon! And finally, is the sprucing up committee (for lack of a better name), including Evan Williams, Nancy Kemmerer, Rick Tsukada and several others. They have been working their way around the meetinghouse cleaning, painting, and organizing several of the rooms, with more to come.

The Board of Directors has been busy all year ensuring that the society's business and events run as smoothly as possible. The Board was expanded this year with two additional councils, Membership and Finance, and it has worked well. We have been very fortunate to have such dedicated and knowledgeable council chairs. We strive to be as transparent as possible. To that end we have our monthly board message during Sunday services and our monthly discussion under the stairs. All our Board meetings are open to members, both in person and by zoom. We will be losing a very valuable member this year, Tina Davies, who will be stepping down as the council chair of Community Within. Tina has been a wealth of information to the Board especially concerning the society's history and details about the USH constitution and by-laws. She has also work diligently in preparing and editing the weekly e-news and other publications. Nancy Kemmerer will be assuming the responsibilities of

the Board President for the coming year (following the vote today). We will be in good hands with her business acumen, her love of USH, and her gentle but persuasive disposition.

Highlights of the last year

1. Rev Bob has agreed to and signed a five-year contract with the Board of Directors!
2. Given her excellent work and dedication, the Board of Directors voted to extend Karolina Wojtysko's hours to full time. And she has agreed to it!
3. The RE program has grown this year under the supervision of Annie Witzler. The OWL program has been restarted in conjunction with the Universalist Church of West Hartford.
4. The music program is growing with the restart of the choir. In addition, there will be the occasional organ music during service.
5. Under Rev Bob's tutelage there have been several new programs started, among which are the:
 - First Thursday Services in the Chapel
 - Thirties and Forties Group
 - First Tuesday's Hangout and Discussion
 - Lunchtime Poetry Workshops
 - Art of Worship Workshops

Appreciation

In addition to those I have already mentioned, I wish to recognize the hard work and dedication of the following persons:

All our staff members go well beyond their call of duty to ensure that the meetinghouse and our congregation is served to the fullest extent possible. To Karolina, Sam, Annie, Kevin, Jazaira, Nani, Briana, and Patty we sincerely thank you.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and long hours of my three predecessors: Eve Pech, Rob Spector, and Martha Bradley. Between covid and the loss of our minister, they all had very difficult years in which to lead USH. But thanks to their leadership we were able to get through those times as best as possible. And I believe we have come out of it as a stronger congregation.

Finally, I want to say thanks to all the members of the congregation. It is through your effort both in time and money that USH remains strong. We will continue to grow through your commitment to the future of the congregation through volunteering and through your pledges. "Love is the spirit of this church and service is its law."

What Lies Ahead

The Board continues to look ahead to continued growth of both our music program and our religious education program. We also look forward to more new members joining the church. It is a joy that we will be having the new member service at the same time as our annual meeting and that this will be the largest group of new members in several years!

In Memoria

I would like to close by remembering all our members who have passed away in the last year and a half.

Richard Grootius

Clara Horn

Barbara Thornberg

Mary Leonard

Barbara Salzberger

Katie Doyle

Bill LaPorte-Bryan

Ira Greenbaum

Gary Bent

Stu Spence

Ed Sax

Peter Upton

Secretary's Report

Gloria Francesca Mengual, Secretary

This year, we certified a total of 136 members to the Unitarian Universalist Association, neither an increase or decrease of 136 from the previous year. While the suggested contribution to the Unitarian Universalist Association used to be based on membership, several years ago this changed so that it is now largely based as a percentage of the church's budget.

We welcomed 8 new members during our May 19th service.

The average weekly attendance at Sunday worship services during the past year was approximately 67 in person and online. On the days where Rev. Bob preached, attendance averaged 99 people in person and online. Average weekly attendance in our Religious Education program was around 7, with current enrollment at about 20.

The following is a list of Members/Friends who died since publication of the last Annual Report: Barbara Thornburg, Bill LaPorte-Bryan, Ed Sax, Mary Leonard, Ira Greenbaum, Peter Upton, Dale Hackett and Benjamin Lanser.

Treasurer's Report

Jon Covault, Treasurer

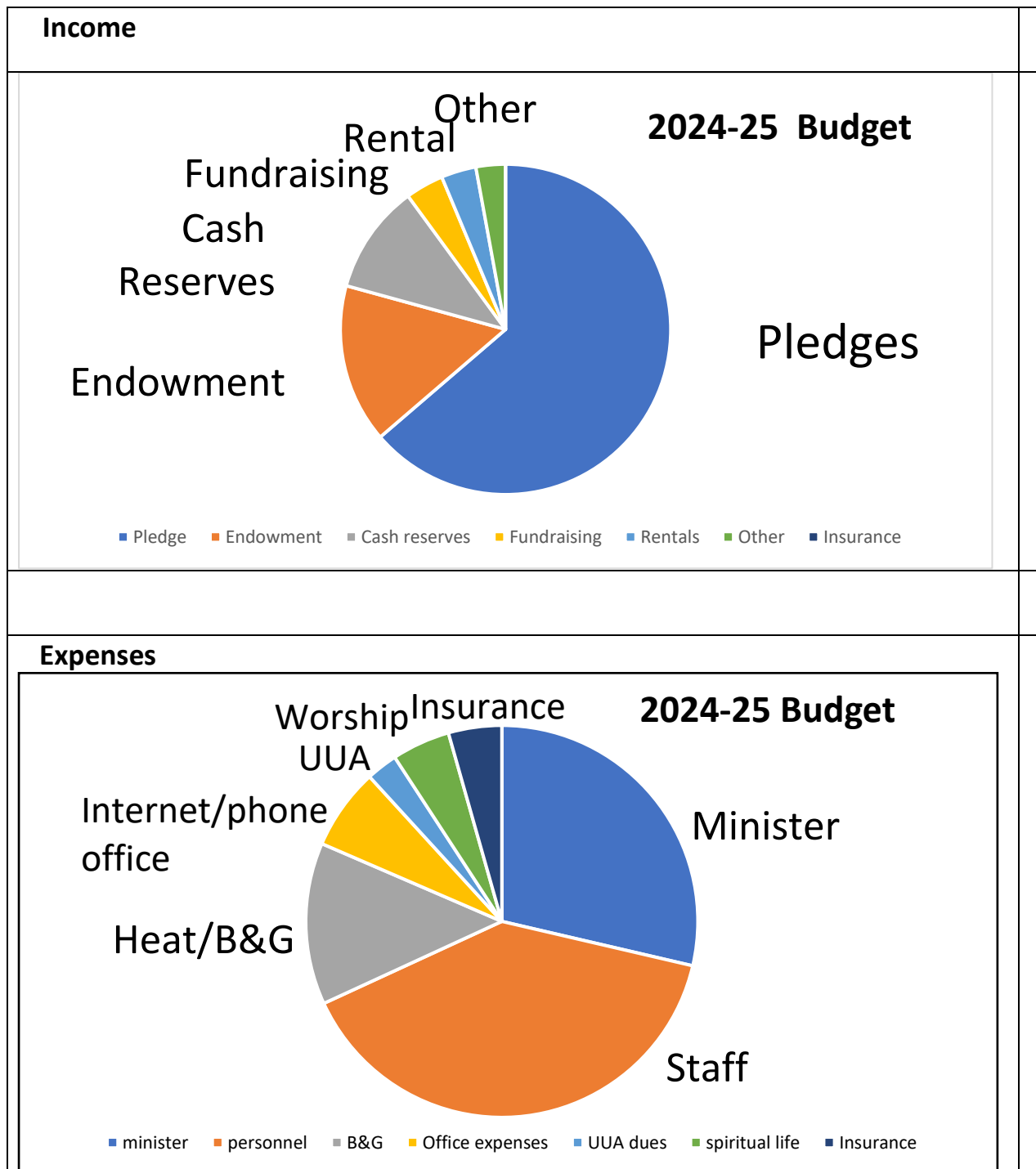
Pledge giving for the current year and pledges to date for FY24-25 are little changed compared with FY22-23 (\$288,000). In contrast many expenses have increased resulting in use of left over COVID paycheck protection funds to balance the FY23-24 (current) budget year in the amount of \$30,750. Fortunately, this FY24 draw on short-term savings is projected to be half of the original FY23-24 anticipated budget short-fall. The smaller FY23-24 deficit is due to the additional revenue from the 2023 year-end stewardship appeal (\$16,000) and reduced administrative, RE, music, worship expenses (\$10,000). Income from rentals, adult programs (Yoga, art sales, Meeting House Presents), and Zero Emissions Renewable solar installation credits are less well-known positive contributors to our annual budget (approx. \$20,000 in aggregate).

Increased expenses include the service contract for our elevator, copier rental, phone/internet fees, health insurance, liability / casualty insurance, staff wage increases and now having a full year, full-time minister. The projected budget short-fall for FY24-25 is \$40,000 or 8.5% of budgeted income (assuming attaining our pledge goal of \$308,000). This will reduce our accumulated past budget

surplus account and emergency fund to approximately \$53,000. Clearly, an important goal for USH is rebuilding our membership numbers and increased giving over time to bring our income and expenses in alignment.

As a comparison, our FY24-25 draft budgeted expenses of \$470,000 are 6.3% above our pre-COVID USH expenses of \$442,000 for FY18-19.

Below are pie charts of our sources of income and expenses for the draft FY24-25 budget.



Endowment Committee

David Newton, Chair

Members: Cris Noble, Jim Venneman, Sherry Manetta, Joe Rubin, and David Newton

Mission: The Endowment Committee is responsible for the prudent and socially responsible investment of Endowment Funds, which will make the USH Endowment more attractive to those considering memorial and other bequests. It takes into consideration the current needs of the Society, preservation of the worth of permanent funds, the original restrictions on gifts and bequests, the economic climate, and the outlook for the future.

During 2023 and 2024 to date, we are pleased to report the Endowment Committee, advisory to the Board, has returned to full strength with the addition of members Sherry Manetta and Joe Rubin, both with strong credentials including experience with USH and past professional employment. The Board has already approved an extension of Joe Rubin's one year term ending in June for a full three-year additional term. As this is written, the Committee is actively engaged in preparing an Endowment Campaign for this Summer and Fall, the first in many years.

Accomplishments: During FY-23-24, the Endowment was key to meeting the expense of repaving the blacktop for handicapped accessible parking and related areas at the West entrance of the Meeting House, and supporting significant expenses associated with replacement of failing sewer pumps in addition to continuing support of the operating budget including certain small project expenses associated with Building and Grounds ongoing maintenance efforts.

The Endowment had a balance of \$1,679,261 on December 31, 2023, which was held with our investment adviser, UBS. It is invested in two portfolios at UBS, with \$1,334,527 in the regular portfolio and \$344,736 in a separate portfolio that can be used to fund special projects approved by the Board. The \$1,679,261 represents an increase of \$376,554 since December 31, 2022, or 29%.

This increase consists of new donations of \$369,970, dividends and interest received of \$40,780, and an increase in the market values of securities of \$142,281; partially reduced by withdrawals primarily for building and grounds improvements and the regular contributions to the USH operating account totaling \$176,477. The major building and grounds improvements were the replacement of the blacktop on the north and south entrance driveways, continuing across the handicapped accessible spaces at the side and across from the West entrance, plus replacing the two over sixty-year-old pumps in the sewer pit, as previously mentioned.

Most endowments strive to disburse, or draw, about 4% to 5% of the average balance over time, in addition to major capital expenditures when necessary. The portion of the draw that supports the USH operating account is well within this range, although the major one-time building and grounds improvements made in the past year caused the total draw to exceed this range. As in any household, major repairs are needed periodically. Your committee will work to keep the average draw within the recommended range over time.

Plans for next year: The Committee will continue to review the Endowment’s investment allocations to ensure they are appropriate to meet the needs of the Society. The Committee is now working with other members on a Planned Giving Initiative to support and grow the Endowment. The Committee suggests we should aim for an endowment of \$3-5 million with endowment income to be available for USH for planned and emergency capital improvements as well as reasonable Operating Budget support.

Staff Reports

Minister’s Annual Report

Rev. Robert Janis

Since you beamed me aboard in July, 2023, it has been an incredible honor to serve as your minister here at Unitarian Society of Hartford. We’re off to a great start, and I’m thrilled to have renewed our contract together for a further five years.

I’m sure you may be interested in just what a minister does all day (after eighteen years of ministry, I’m still not entirely sure myself!). But before I get to an accounting of my year, I’d like to start with what I have observed about you, this congregation. I’m still learning about Unitarian Society of Hartford; many of you know this place and this community a lot better than I do. In my short time here, I have found this community to be:

CARING: I’ve seen the way this congregation comes together – at special events, at funerals, or just in community after service Sunday after Sunday. You matter to each other, and it shows.

RESOURCEFUL: This congregation managed without a minister for a year and a half – and managed quite well, leading with sustaining worship services, multiple activities, and pastoral care. Bright, inventive, contacts in the wider area, a can-do attitude - this is a congregation that knows how to get stuff done.

FLEXIBLE: I hear less of the “but this is the way we’ve always done things” here than I’ve heard at many congregations. Though there is a strong and healthy appreciation of tradition, this is not a congregation that is stuck in its ways. This is a major plus.

CREATIVE: The artistic talent and discernment of this congregation has been an asset for many decades. But it’s worth nothing again what a haven this place is for painters, musicians, fabric artists, writers, dancers, and starving poets¹.

HEALING: This congregation has been through a lot. The work of healing is far from over. Who can say how long healing takes in an institution, and amongst its people? Be as gentle with each other and yourselves as you can.

¹ ¹ Since you asked, generally I try to eat healthy, but I’ll seldom turn down a blueberry muffin, or a baked good of any description.

FRIENDLY: We're a good mix of introverts and extroverts, but we all like to get to know new people, whether it's in our wonderful building or elsewhere in the world.

FUNNY: As much as I like to think of myself as the quickest wit in the West, a few of y'all have me beat handily. But it's more than just puns: humor is close to *humility*, and this is a congregation that can laugh about life a little bit.

DEVOTED: Though we may not take ourselves too seriously, we take what we do together very seriously indeed. There is a deep sense of commitment here – to each other, to free inquiry, to justice, to the ways of peace. To doing things the right way, and making the world more beautiful and better. With every paint stroke, every washed dish, every friendly word, every act of intention and generosity, we practice this.

Do you agree? What would you add to this list?

OK, so now on to the main body of my report. For ease of comprehension, I've divided it into four general categories:

- **SUNDAYS, WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:** Everything that happens on, or is involved in the planning of, what is still our biggest day – Sunday – as well as worship services and RE Events that happen on other days.
- **PROGRAMMING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE:** All the other community events that happen throughout the week.
- **PASTORAL CARE AND RITES OF PASSAGE:** Weddings, funerals, home and hospital visits, and so on.
- **BEHIND THE SCENES/FOUNDATIONAL:** All of the “bricks and mortar” stuff that allows all the above to happen – staff supervision, board and committee work, etc.

For each category, I've included a “**Going Forward**” section with suggestions and thoughts on the year ahead.

SUNDAYS, WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

It's been a joy working with our Worship Associates, led by Sue Smolski, who bring discernment and dedication to their many roles planning and preparing worship. With the ever-astounding Sam Moffett leading our choir and musicians, a great Tech Team with Diana Cipriano and some very amazing volunteers (our Treasurer, President, and Spirit Life Chair are all often involved in the tech as well as their copious other responsibilities), and our brilliant Chancel Arts team, it's an impressive team effort every Sunday. I've given sermons once or twice before coming to USH, but I still have a lot to learn. As guest speakers have commented, this is a wonderful place to speak: grand, welcoming, and perceptive ears.

We covered plenty of different interesting topics, and I won't recap them here. Hard to believe this is already my preantepenultimate² Sunday, give or take of the 2023-2024 year.

² Fourth from the last

Children's and Youth Religious Education has been led with verve and diligence by Annie Witzler, with talented assistance from many volunteers and our paid nursery caregiver, Nani Perez. For more detailed info on that, you can read Annie's report in this packet. I just want to note with appreciation Annie's care and ingenuity in crafting a program with many different elements, including giving our children more of a sense of connection to the rest of our community through monthly attendance at worship, and also getting started a new session of Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education for our youth. Along with Equinox/Labyrinth, Christmas Eve and Solstice, non-Sunday worships have included a monthly Thursday vespers, in our chapel space. This has had good attendance – evenings have a different “feel” and it is nice to provide something a little different. I have also led preaching and worship classes for those interested in what goes into crafting a service and writing a sermon.

Going Forward: There is always room for improvement, experimentation, and discernment when it comes to worship, and we always welcome suggestions! As I write this we are in search for a Director of Religious Education, which involves deep conversations about what religious education means to the congregation, and what it might mean in future. It's not easy being Interim Religious Education Coordinator in the midst of all this, and again, my thanks and commendation to Annie Witzler.

PROGRAMMING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

There is already a lot going on here at USH, and part of my goal in the first year has been to participate occasionally in various activities and get to know the diversity of offerings. If I haven't gotten to your group, program, or committee yet, I'd love to come sometime (if it's helpful). It's been a delight for my spirit as well as helpful to our shared ministry, and I hope to continue sporadic attendance in years to come (I wish it were more often, but there are only so many hours in the day!)

This year I also offered a few offerings led or co-led by me: a monthly drop-in discussion and hangout series on Tuesdays; a workshop exploring the medium of poetry; and a 30s and 40s group. I love adult religious education and spirituality and am always delighted to brainstorm new offerings – so if you have an idea, and want some help with it, come see me! I'm less keen on being the sole facilitator of groups for any significant stretch of time; my philosophy is “If it's worth doing, it's worth doing collaboratively.” It's been really pleasing to see people share the leadership in each of these groups mentioned.

There are so many great initiatives going on in Social Justice, as I learned on the monthly Tuesday night call. My thanks to Judy Sullivan for her great facilitative leadership, and anyone who wants to know what's going on at the congregation would be well served by tuning in. I've also been super impressed and encouraged by the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), of which we are a founding partner. They're doing real work on the ground making Connecticut more equitable, more just, and more environmentally friendly – it was great to co-host a GHIAA meeting at USH recently with Urban Hope Refuge and New Antioch Baptist Church. “The Sum of Us”, led by Gloria Francesca Mengual, has been a fascinating look at how we can work together for the greater good in our racially divided country. In sum, I'm learning the lay of the land, and excited about the possibilities for working with others in meaningful, fulfilling, and justice-centered ways.

Going forward: My specific plans for next year include doing some sort of workshop around the Bible; continuing the Tuesday discussions and 30s & 40s Group, and possibly restarting the poetry group; maybe looking for ways to have more meetings “out and about” at coffeeshops and bookshops; and getting more personally involved with GHIAA’s vital efforts. I’m sure there will be other possibilities too...

PASTORAL CARE AND RITES OF PASSAGE

We’ve had several funerals this year, and grief is close to the surface at our community this year. So is that sense of caring: so many have stepped up for care for families going through tough times. I could mention dozens of people, but I do want to personally thank Janice and David Newton for planning so many receptions, where our caring was on full and abundant display.

Weddings have been relatively few, and this year we haven’t had too many child dedications at our aqueosalinocalcalinoceraceoaluminosocupreovitriolic³ waters. But I hope we’ll have more in future, and we are gearing up to find ways to do more events and ceremonies here in future.⁴

It was a delight getting to know so many of you this year. I am also aware there are many of you I haven’t had much of a chance to get to know yet. If you’re interested, I am always honored and delighted to chat about any subject – or about nothing in particular. It’s one of the parts of the job I like best.

Going forward: A reminder to PLEASE let me know if you – or someone you know – could use a visit or a meeting. I know in the movies the clergyperson just shows up at the hospital bedside the instant they’re needed⁵. In reality, however, we clergy have to be informed – and given how busy the weeks are, a reminder doesn’t hurt, either. I reiterate that I really enjoy meeting with people – it doesn’t have to be an emergency – and if I’m able to, I will make it happen.

BEHIND THE SCENES/FOUNDATIONAL

One of the things that makes my job so rewarding, meaningful and fun is we have an absolutely amazing staff and lay leadership team. Karolina Wojtysko, currently our office administrator and next year our Church Operations Manager, can seemingly do anything, and does it with such warmth, ingenuity and professionalism. Along with the aforementioned Sam Moffett, Annie Witzler and Nani Perez, we have wonderfully capable, dedicated, and now experienced staff in Kevin Girouard, Jazaira Perez-Acevedo, Brianna Bittel, and Patty Peck. I’m still learning how to be the best supervisor I can be, and it’s one of the most important responsibilities I have. As for lay leadership, Dana Donovan has been a thoroughly wonderful partner-in-virtue this year: Dana’s pastoral skills, his constant presence, along with his vision for growth, justice and partnership have been an inspiration for me this year. We have a Board of Directors that, by our institutional design, wear many hats – so I will, fairly regularly, meet with Laurie Kelleher about membership, Tina Davies about Community Life, Rick Tsukada about Spiritual Life, and Paul Cipriano, Jim Venneman, and Jon Covault about matters of administration and

³ A descriptor of water quality, traditionally referring to the waters of Bath, England, rather than Hartford.

⁴ To make things fun for me, I let my kids each choose a word for me to include in my annual report. Can you guess which two words they chose?

⁵ Played by Pat O’ Brien, or, if you’re really lucky, Dawn French.

finance. And it has been a pleasure looking forward to next year with your President-Elect Nancy Kemmerer. Your Board works very, very hard, without compensation, to make this community exciting, sustainable, visionary and fair. My deep thanks to them.

Our Committee on Shared Ministry and I have thought through the opportunities, challenges and possibilities of this shared ministry. On my end, I came in worried about the potential limitations – living an hour away; balancing parenting and ministry; being a little older and wiser than I was in my twenties, but also a tad less energetic. But I've been pleased and grateful how together, we have made it work. This congregation takes shared ministry seriously, both taking responsibility, and allowing its lay and staff leadership the leeway to lead according to their own gifts and personalities. I asked to renew our shared contract for five years, because I felt that it was a good, manageable stretch of time for us to plan together how we would like to make a difference here at USH, and out in the world. We can reevaluate then – five years can go very quickly these days!

Going forward: Next year may be an opportune time to ask some deep questions. I know this congregation has already had some listening and discernment groups in recent years, but I believe it's always helpful to reflect together on what we're all about – plus, the yearning has been expressed many times of how good it is to eat and be in fellowship together. So we'll look for some opportunities to do that.

Gold star, if you read all of that! Stop by my office and I'll be happy to get you the sticker. In conclusion: four years after the pandemic started, with geopolitics in quite a state, the world is in a particularly chaotic, unreliable place these days. This is doubly true for religious and spiritual organizations, which are facing declining memberships, aging demographics, and changed public priorities. This unpredictability makes it hard to plan. It's still important to have a plan, to make a frank assessment of where our opportunities lie, and what are our shared priorities. Just as importantly as the *what*, we can focus on the *how* and the *why*? Tomorrow may be unpredictable, but *how* do we want to live it? With what qualities, virtues, and guiding lights do we propose to live together in love, and seek the truth in freedom? *Why* are we doing this?

The *why* is revealed to me every day in this ministry. It's in your care, your thoughtfulness, your devotion to the good, and our shared journey in reason, faith, beauty, and action. Here's to the first of what will hopefully be several great years together!

Yours gratefully,

Rev. Bob

Coordinator of Religious Education

Annie Witzler

Mission Statement:

It is the goal of the Religious Education Sub-Council of the Unitarian Society of Hartford that our children find community and connection at the Meeting House, that they feel loved, respected, and heard, and that we give them the guidance to find their own answers to their most deeply felt concerns. We ourselves are guided by the words of 19th Century Unitarian minister, William Ellery Channing: "The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up their own; not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own; Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth; Not to form an outward regularity, but to touch inward springs. In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul, to excite and cherish spiritual life."

Our numbers are not as large as they once were, but still, we hold the desire in our hearts to gather and share in our living tradition as Unitarian Universalists, and through adaptation and ingenuity, we are regrowing anew, stronger and as beautiful as what came before.

Structure for the 23-24 Church Year:

Following the success of our previous year, which saw the first steady attendance of RE activities since the pandemic, we sought to find ways to build deeper, meaningful connections within our congregation and with our neighboring communities. To accomplish this goal, the structure of how our Sundays were scheduled and themed changed, while our age groups remained the same.

Our age groups this year consisted of:

- **The Sprouts Nursery (infants thru Kindergarten):** The focus of this age group is to create a nurturing and comfortable environment for our youngest congregants and their families. We provided toys, art supplies, books, and more to foster curiosity and fun while parents were able to watch and participate in the adult service via the modern wonder of live streaming. We also had dedicated nursery staff and volunteers available every Sunday throughout the year.
- **The Chalice Clubhouse (Kindergarten thru 6th grade):** The focus of this age group is to create a welcoming, fun environment meant to foster compassion, critical thinking, and open mindedness in the formative years of the children in our Congregation. We read stories, played games, and made crafts all with our seven principles and six sources of UUism as the guiding compass of our work and shared time together. We had dedicated staff and volunteers working with this age group every Sunday throughout the year.
- **The USH Youth Group (6th grade thru 12th grade):** The focus of this age group is to create a safe, judgment-free space to express themselves and grow freely. They have learned what values we hold dear as UU's, but now they have the chance to determine for themselves how they want to express those values in their own unique way. We hold discussions, do a year-long service project to feed the hungry in and around the city of Hartford, and plan a Youth-led service at the end of the school year. A group of dedicated youth leaders and other volunteers worked with our youth every Sunday.

Meanwhile, we adopted a rotating Sunday schedule of themed RE programming each month to give a variety of experiences to our RE participants. The monthly schedule was as follows:

- **1st Sundays - Faith Focus Sundays:** A Sunday where children and youth are invited into the Sanctuary to observe and participate in the service. A room off to the side of the ambulatory, the Quiet Room, was available with quiet activities such as coloring pages, crossword puzzles, and books if anyone wished for more tactile stimulation. Children and youth saw our chalice being lit, sang along to hymns, lit candles of memory and hope, and even participated in several rituals throughout the year. They were given a hands-on learning experience of what worship can be in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, with countless religious, spiritual, and philosophical views presented in a way that is affirmed by our community.
- **2nd and 4th Sundays - Sunday School:** Sundays where designated programming for our age groups was available and facilitated by our RE staff and volunteers. The Sprouts Nursery had full access to a variety of curated materials and toys to share with one another and also could hear the lesson of their older peers in the Chalice Clubhouse. The Chalice Clubhouse read picture books relating to our sources of faith, upcoming holidays, or American heritage months and had accompanying crafts and games. The USH Youth Group held discussions about a variety of topics relating to current events, had guest speakers from the congregation come in to talk about their spiritual journeys, and even did yoga together.
- **3rd Sundays - Community Soup Sundays:** Sundays where the USH Youth Group prepared their famous soup (an average of 20 gallons each month!) for their year-long service project to feed the hungry in and around the city of Hartford, and also sold to congregants to fundraise for their year-end field trip. Meanwhile, the Chalice Clubhouse and Sprouts Nursery prepared Fellowship Hall for congregants to eat their soup in a clean and well-decorated space. Participants would scrub tables, set up cups, and prepare decorations as a way to also give back to their congregation. We had themes usually based around upcoming holidays or the changing of the seasons.

This year also marked a milestone for the regrowth of USH's RE program with the first supplemental RE program offering since before the Covid-19 pandemic. Our Whole Lives (OWL), a comprehensive lifespan education class offered by the UUA, was offered to families of 9th and 10th graders in a joint effort with the Universalist Church of West Hartford. This program is set to continue into the autumn of the 2024-2025 church year.

Accomplishments:

While there are many accomplishments to be celebrated this year, perhaps the greatest of all is the growing sense of community among our RE families. This year we have seen friendships blossom, heard about playdates and birthday parties, and seen such joy in being together. **A heartfelt thank you to all who have fostered a special place in our congregation for the youngest amongst us: Nani Perez, Karolina Wojtysko, Paula and Brian Matzke, Sarah Krippenstapel, Evan Williams, Mike Ericson, John Bengston, Walter Johnson, Rick Tsukada, Patrica McKee, Elizabeth and Winston Beale, Nina Elgo, Lucille Giammatteo, and Rev. Bob Janis.**

For those seeking a more objective list of our RE program's accomplishments over the last year, here they are:

- Had over 20 enrollments in our RE program throughout the 23'-24' church year, double from the previous year.
- Held an average attendance of 7-10 participants per week in RE throughout the year.
- Conducted formal orientations for RE volunteers for the first time since the pandemic.
- Connected with over a dozen new families, most of whom have returned to visit with us since their initial visit.
- Donated nearly 200 gallons of soup to soup kitchens in Hartford and encouraged further donations of clothing and toiletries to Church Street Eats, one of our major partners in the Youth Soup project.
- Re-integrated our children and youth back into worship services, even if only once a month.
- Communicated with families every week consistently via weekly RE-newsletter.
- Forged meaningful partnerships with the teenage Youth Groups between the Universalist Church of West Hartford and the Urban Hope Refuge Church in Hartford.
- Launched a successful supplemental RE program, Our Whole Lives (OWL), as requested by our families.

Plans for the Future:

For the '24-'25 church year, our RE program hopes to continue with the rejuvenated energy we have created this year with new ideas and projects to further our reach to more families and friends to share in our ongoing journey. Some ideas for next year are:

- Neighboring Faith Field Trips: Quarterly field trips to neighboring houses of worship in USH's local area to help foster deeper understanding and curiosity about what others believe and how they live out their faith.
- Family Friday Nights: Monthly Friday nights where adults can get some time to themselves while our RE volunteers provide fun, enriching activities for the children and youth of families.
- In Our Neighborhood Field Trips: Quarterly field trips to local museums, historical sites, and parks to explore our world and feel inspired by the arts, the humanities, and the sciences.

We are always looking to improve upon what already exists as well. Aspects of RE we look forward to making even better next year are:

- Volunteer recruitment and training.
- Communication between volunteers and staff.
- Spiritual enrichment for our volunteers and staff.
- More efficient and customer-friendly soup Sunday management.
- More hands-on activities for our USH Youth Group.
- More collaboration with neighboring congregations and houses of worship.



Religious Education 2023-2024

Church Office and Building Rentals

Karolina Wojtysko, Office Administrator/Rentals Manager

This past fiscal year has been very productive within the church office. I have helped transform the office into a welcoming space with many updates and upgrades to accommodate the needs of any staff or volunteers. I invite members to stop by and visit me, make a cup of coffee with our new in office coffee station, and take a mini tour to get yourself acquainted with the space. Many office supplies and forms have moved. If you ever need assistance locating anything, please reach out to me.

From house cleaning of old records, to organizing current records and keeping digital copies readily available; sourcing information has never been easier because of this. Crucial non-profit information such as tax exemption certificates and insurance policies to our church bylaws, meeting minutes and directory are readily available. This is a continuing effort, and if you have records or information you would like to submit to USH, please stop by anytime.

This is my first year at USH with a Full-time minister. Rev. Bob has brought many exciting new monthly gatherings that have been well attended. I've enjoyed collaborating with Rev. Bob over the past year to provide unique and inspiring worship services. He has also provided us with a new weekly

e-news submission “Thoughts from the Pastor” that keeps congregants and visitors connected to USH. I am excited to continue working with Rev. Bob, the Worship Associates, and our staff to create more personal and relatable content to reach new visitors curious about UU and USH.

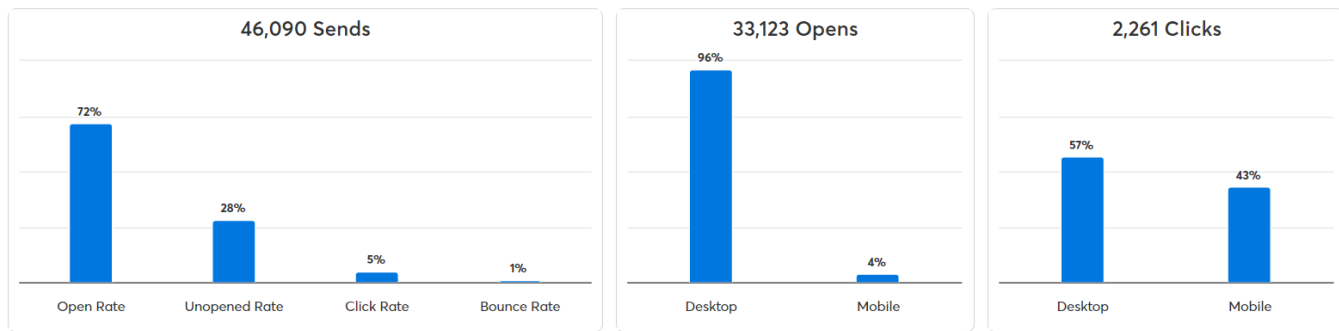
One significant accomplishment in that past year has been the full implementation of Constant Contact, USH’s prime source for e-weekly updates to the congregation. I assisted in the development of a new bi-weekly publication for all USH gatherings in an effort to shorten the weekly e-newsletter. Our current e-newsletter is being received and opened, with a weekly open rate of seventy-two percent. Most contacts are using their desktop computers versus their mobile devices to view the newsletters. In the future, I would like to see an increase in openings, contacts, and mobile views. One of Constant Contacts most important features, the social media posting tool, is currently not being used to potentially drive more traffic to our website and social media pages. I would recommend a revision of the current e-newsletter formatted to properly display in both desktop view and mobile view so we can utilize this service.

Past 12 Months Click rate ⓘ

Overview

Download As ▾

A look at some of your top emailing stats during the selected time range.



You may have noticed around the meeting house all of the updated signs, USH brochures, and even new giving envelopes. The Welcome team has undergone a complete worship packet upgrade, stocked with up-to-date useful information for visitors. The pew pockets have received a face lift with new content, and the weekly Orders of Service and Happenings inserts had a minor makeover. My goal for the new year is to continue updating these materials as new information is available.

I am honored to announce that beginning the new 2024-2025 church year, I have accepted to move from part-time to full-time employment at USH. I am thankful for everyone’s affirmations and recognition of my dedication to the USH community and mission of the congregation. Starting July 2024, I will no longer be the Office Administrator and Building Rentals Manager. My new title, Church Operations Manager, will still carry the same roles and responsibilities I held in the past year. With increased hours, my goal for 2024-2025 is to better support this congregation and take us to new heights. There are many contemporary and innovative changes to come in the next year which will require much time and strategic planning from staff and volunteers. What happens next in USH’s upcoming chapter, will be revealed in next year’s annual report. Stay tuned.

In rental news, I am happy to report that through increased online presence and word of mouth advertising, we opened our doors to welcome two couples who joined in marriage under the beautiful

and symbolic roof of our sanctuary. I am reminded of an experience I had here at USH, shortly after I had begun my employment. I was greeted by a beautiful couple who stopped by one morning for a personal request. The couple had gotten married here at USH 30 years prior and on their anniversary, they thought it would be a fun day trip to re-visit the place they made their vows. I was happy to invite the couple to our sanctuary, who after 30 years continued to emit a young loving energy for each other that moved me as they held each other. I was honored to photograph to fulfill their request for a photo to share with their friends and family on social media. My goal for the 2024-2025 year is to open our doors far and wide to couples, providing everyone with not only a beautiful venue, but a memorable wedding experience so in 30 years time, they too can come back and re-live their special day, and look back on their beautiful life journey.

Aside from weddings, our space this past year has been active for a variety of USH community and family events. We have seen an influx in rental requests for meeting spaces, member and non-member. Sadly, I do report that USH had hosted a large number of memorial services in the past year, not only for our own beloved members, but also for families in our local Hartford community. I am proud to work for a congregation that opens it's arms to anyone in need, and has never turned anyone away regardless of whether it's for the families' personal beliefs or financial complications. Many thanks to our Caring Network team, who have provided love, support, and dignity to countless families in the past year, including the staff.

In the new year, I would like to see more progress made in booking events of all nature. This would require an overhaul of the current rental information provided to those whom request it, and new marketing strategies to let the Hartford community know we are here, and we want to be apart of your most memorable moments. A proposal to increase rental rates would need to be addressed, as church property insurance rates have increase significantly for 2024-2025.

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the entire Board, Rev. Bob, Kevin Girouard, Sam Moffett, Annie Witzler, Briana Bittel, Jazaria Acevedo Perez, Nani Perez, John Bengston, The Building and Grounds Committee, The Caring Network Committee, The Worship Associates, Chancel Art, Tina Davies, Jim Venneman, Evan Williams and Susan Hope. A large part of my roles and responsibilities is to support the congregation as a whole, and provide administrative support for our Board, Minister, Councils and sub committees. The knowledge and experience I have gained through the year has shaped me to better serve you and the congregations evolving needs. I couldn't have gained this knowledge and experience without the support and assistance everyone provides to continue to make this a truly special place to work. I am inspired by your dedication and hard work that have seeded into the ground, and look forward to the next year as new roots take hold.

Karolina Wojtysko
Office Administrator

Council on Administration

The Administrative Council is composed of the following sub-councils (chairperson):

Administration Council (Paul Cipriano)

Building and Grounds (David Newton)

Ambulatory Art (Diane Cadrain)

Archives (Larry Lunden)

Security Committee (Lucille Giammatteo and Laura Cipriano)

Administration Report

Chair: Paul Cipriano

The Administrative Council continues to focus on security at the Meeting House in 2023-24. The Meeting House now has a keyless lobby entrance, doorbell camera and cameras covering all the main entries and rooms of the meeting house. The cameras can be monitored from the main office and remotely using smartphones.

We added a building-wide intercom with loudspeakers in the ambulatory and in Fellowship Hall. This intercom can be accessed using our existing phone system in the event of an emergency. Through our insurance company we have sensors in the lobby for heat and water detection that are monitored continuously, and alerts are sent when needed. We also have two-armed intruder alert alarm pulls in strategic locations around the Meeting House.

The Security Committee is developing emergency response plans which will be used at the Meeting House. Once the plans are approved there will be practice drills involving the congregation to evaluate each individual emergency response plan. The plans are in the works for fires, medical emergencies, toxic spills, power failures, and intruder alerts. We will coordinate these plans with input from first responders from the City of Hartford.

We are also in the process of applying for security grants at the state and federal level to fund improvements in the safety and security of the meeting house and its exterior including the parking lot. We are looking to install exterior solar lighting both outside the Meeting House entrances and the parking areas. While there are no guarantees we will be awarded the grants we will continue to apply when the funds become available.

We still have money remaining from the 2022-23 grant and we have been given the approval to purchase two more cameras for the parking lot and two electronic door locks. One lock will be for the handicapped main entry and one for the outer office door. Both will be controlled from the main office during normal business hours and special events.

Thank you to all those who give their time, efforts, and expertise to make our Meeting House a safer, more user-friendly, and beautiful place for our congregation and the public to gather.

Paul Cipriano
Administrative Council Chair

Building & Grounds Sub-Council

Chair: David Newton

Members: Paul Cipriano, Laura Cipriano, Lucille Giammatteo, Toni Gold, Bill Simmons, Peter Meny, Ron Sexton, Jim Venneman, Fred Louis, Hugh Schweitzer, Evan Williams, Paula Bleck, Aaron Bleck

Friends of B&G: Janice Newton, Tina Davies, Jon Covault, Susan Hope

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

Submitted by David Newton, Chair, Building and Grounds

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



It is fitting to begin this year's Annual Report with a picture of the berm lake created by heavy rain. A 6.5-inch rainfall on July 4th flooded into the west entrance and down the stairs. The good news was the Sanctuary roof did not leak, and elsewhere there was minimal incursions of water including particularly the office. Subsequently, record breaking rains continued into the winter and spring of 2024. The berm lake was increased in capacity November 10th, which was immediately tested again and again by further extraordinary rainfall. This construction reduced the stress on the capacity of the west drain in front of the building entrance because it takes about a half a day for the lake to drain away.

In late May, the blacktop was replaced on the north and south entrance driveways continuing across the handclapped accessible spaces at the side and across from the West entrance. Striping lines have been added to the accessible parking spaces and the north driveway.

To our surprise, we received an education in the function of the sewer pit located in a room adjacent to Fellowship Hall. One of the two pumps that move sewage upward to the sewer main failed on June 28th creating a pending emergency if the second pump also failed. Subsequent efforts to install two new pumps were frustrated by delays in obtaining and installing appropriate replacement pumps, and

to make a long story short, the situation was finally resolved for years to come on November 8th with no significant inconvenience to ongoing programs during the interval of concern.

Efforts to obtain funding via a grant for security enhancements were successful, resulting, among other improvements, in camera coverage of interior rooms and the roof providing remote observation and safety monitoring. In addition, combinations were provided to congregation members to control entrance via touch pad during times when the building is otherwise locked. Safety protocols are being worked out in addition to camera coverage. An effort continues to gain an additional grant for related external lighting.

Also, a grant was obtained for the purpose of writing a nomination for the Meeting House to be included in the National Register of Historic Places. A major historic review of our records in the Archives and records of other Victor Lundy projects as well as his life history culminated in a nomination prepared by Building Conservation Associates that was unanimously recommended by The State Historic Preservation Review Board when they voted unanimously on 3.22.24 to approve the Nomination of the 50 Bloomfield Avenue Unitarian Meeting House designed by Victor Lundy for Inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The approval of the nomination by the National Park Service is expected.

Meanwhile there was a general cleanup of Fellowship Hall, repurposing of Classroom D, and improvements in Servetus. These efforts including some painting, lighting fixture upgrades, and various repairs, and various finishing details are ongoing at this time in the three meditation rooms and elsewhere. The Chancel Lift has been repaired and various adjustments to improve accessibility are ongoing. Efforts continue to keep the roof free of grunge, drains open, and roof paint white.

The aesthetics of our Memorial Garden and entrance plantings were exemplary during the growing season, reflecting well on the inhabitants of our Meeting House. Unlike so many other projects, maintaining growing things requires sustained unending efforts.

This year the Board created an Audio Visual Services Department assigned to Building and Grounds. We have been very fortunate to have Diana Cipriano as our paid staff who operates the AV equipment and produces the weekly stream. Karolina coordinates the zoom room for streaming most Sundays, while Rick Tsukada, Paul Cipriano and Jon Covault fill in for Karolina or Diana from time to time, in addition, they may run a wireless sound board to adjust microphone inputs to the Sanctuary speakers. Additional volunteers are welcome to join the AV group.

Significant work this year marks the 3-year anniversary of weekly streaming of audio/video services. During the year we experienced random re-booting during service of the AV computer that was eventually identified as a RAM memory problem. Replacement of the RAM chips resolved the matter. The system includes three remote pan/zoom cameras in the Sanctuary. The enhanced Sanctuary lighting has noticeably improved the video quality. For summer service we will again move one camera to Fellowship Hall. Last summer a new dedicated intranet cable was run from Fellowship Hall to the AV computer in the office to improve our remote control of the camera and video quality. Link to service video archive (including memorial services): <https://vimeo.com/unitariansocietyhartford/videos>

As we conclude this report, we thank many participants in the formal and informal projects and efforts of the Building and Grounds Sub-Council. This extends beyond those listed above. For those who have joined in, we deeply appreciate your efforts.

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

Ambulatory Art

Diane Cadrain, Chair

The Ambulatory Art Sub-council continues to meet regularly, brainstorming, contacting artists, and displaying their work. Here's a look at a few of our recent accomplishments and plans.

Schedule of upcoming art exhibits.

- Our Spring 2024 exhibit shows fiber art hangings by Anne Sheffield.
- July-August-September 2024: Digital work by Stuart Williams, father of congregant Evan Williams
- October-November-December 2024: Art quilts by fiber artist Mary Lachman.
- January-February-March 2025: Art quilts by renowned local fiber artist EdJohnetta Miller.
- April-May-June 2025—*Found object assemblages* by Joe Magdol
- July-August-September 2025—Open
- October-November-December 2025: Spirit collages by Lori Barker
<http://www.spiritcollage.com/artiststatement.html>.

We are also considering an “invitational” show of art by any congregant who chooses to participate, possibly during the summer of 2025. More details will be shared as these plans take shape.

Proceeds from art sales. In other Ambulatory Art news, our sub council is proud to announce that our congregation has earned \$450 in proceeds from art sales since July 2023. When someone purchases an artwork, 70 percent of the sale price goes to the artist, and 30 percent goes to the congregation.

How to get your work considered. For those who are interested in displaying work in the Ambulatory Gallery, we have formulated a document of instructions and information, available hanging in the Ambulatory itself, near the door to the sanctuary.

The Ambulatory Art Sub-council continues to meet regularly to offer original art, a valuable enhancement to our congregational life.

USH Archives Annual Report

Chair: Larry Lunden.

Members: Sue Smolski

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:

- Our big news this year is that we doubled our space following the relocation of the Chancel Arts committee. We received three surplus filing cabinets and an empty shelving unit. This will give us expansion space for the future. We are in the process of using the space to good advantage.
- Larry created a digital index to the rites of passage we have on file, mostly for the last 24 years. The Office administrator will maintain this valuable reference.
- Larry also met with the National Historical Register consultants, who were impressed with our extensive collection of materials. They took photographs of much of the material for their research.
- The Office administrator has been organizing the office files, and the Archives has been the recipient of much of the materials. We have been culling them and retaining and filing the relevant material.
- The membership book was moved to the Archives where it will be stored when not in use.
- We helped several congregants to find historical materials they needed. One was an Order of Service from 2013 needed for a service. We have a collection of OOS at least back to 1972.
- Another was researching the Memorial Garden. Another was researching the evolution of our Worship Associates.
- We were allocated bulletin board space in the lower lobby. Sue has been posting materials in an effort to publicize the Archives.
- Diana Heymann and Louise Schmoll graciously culled and organized the Women's Alliance records.

- We met with Rev Bob to discuss rites of passage records. He agreed to provide copies of relevant documents which will once again be part of our archives. Copies of marriage licenses are often requested many years after the event.
- We received copies of our deeds and corporate documents, the Worship Associate handbook, and the book that documents our fabric art collection.

We appreciate the Aesthetics Committee for providing a cover for our worktable, and the Buildings and Grounds for correcting the light switches.

Our plans for next year:

Continue to maintain new material in a tidy manner, including the weekly eNews, weekly orders of service, and monthly Board minutes in a timely manner.

Utilize the new space to rearrange our collection for easier access.

Continue to bring the archival materials to the attention of the congregation.

Council on Community Within

Chair: Tina Davies

Overall: For the past few years, our efforts have fallen mostly into a “holding” category. This year, with Covid disruptions increasingly in the rear-view mirror, and with the anticipated stability of a highly-regarded minister in a multiple-year contract, it’s been possible to visualize a future of expanded opportunities for communal learning and socializing within our society.

Several “full society” gatherings were facilitated following Sunday worship: at ingathering, a post-Thanksgiving “Thanks Again” potluck championed by Rick Tsukada, a Groundhog Day celebratory pot luck, and a year-end picnic/pot luck coming in June. Smaller “enhanced coffee hour” events celebrated Rev Bob’s arrival, the semi-annual meeting, stewardship, and new members, among other things. We do enjoy each other’s company, and enjoy eating together.

At the same time, weekday/evening programs continued to attract participants. The Lunch Bunch has a regular cadre of folks who meet to “solve the world’s problems”. Monthly Movie and Pizza gatherings typically draw 20 - 30 folks. Weekly yoga sessions are popular. We have a small and growing Men’s Group. Connection Circles offered two ‘semesters’ of small-group gatherings, both daytime and evening (the day group was held at Seabury, this session easily filled.) Saturday Sing-Alongs continue. the Magdalene Circle, organized by a long-time member, comprises mostly non-USH folks but is open to interested and compatible members. The Artist’s Way group and Book Club meet primarily on Zoom, but remain highly active. These groups all contribute to the life of our congregation.

Meeting House Presents, a concert series, had a slow start this year but finished strong, with a serendipitously-scheduled concert by Holly Near.

The Caring Network continues its work of identifying and supporting members in need... whether of a ride or a friendly phone call. The Network has been stretched this year by the high number of memorial receptions it's been called on to organize: this was a record it's hoped we don't repeat. But the support offered to families in loss or even crisis is invaluable. For several years much of what normally would be pastoral care fell to the Caring Network which was able to arrange, when needed, for a minister from the region to offer pastoral services in person or remotely. Having Rev. Bob on site has relieved the Network of much of this area of care; having him "in the house" has been invaluable.

The Communications aspect of this Council often intersects with other Councils, but remains 'home base' for the weekly e-news and web page. the e-news has been operating from Constant Contact's e-mail marketing platform for one year now and, while the vehicle has yet to deliver on some of its promises, it is overall a better option than its forerunner ("Emma") and is less costly. Thanks to Karolina Wojtysko's technical proficiency, we manage to produce a weekly newsletter, with two spun-off supplements for gatherings and RE, every week.

There is one thing we aimed to do this year, but which remains on a "to-do" list: creating an "events team" — a group of people willing to pitch in, on occasions when extra hands are needed (picnics, concerts, potlucks, etc.) It was thought this contingent could operate in the manner of the Welcome Team: for an upcoming event, tasks could be itemized and a Sign-Up Genius event posted so volunteers could sign up online to move furniture, serve food, clean up post-event, direct parking, etc.) It's hoped the next council chair may make headway, as such a group would be helpful.

Membership Sub-Council

Chair: Laurie Kelliher

7/2/23- 9/3/23 for all speakers: 56 people in person/Sunday
 11 people on Zoom/ Sunday

9/10/23 to 4/28/24 for all speakers: 74 people in person/Sunday
 15 people on Zoom/Sunday

The members of the Unitarian Society of Hartford are our sacred community. When people come to USH for the first time they give varied reasons for their visit. Some were simply driving by and became curious about our building and what it looks like inside. At the other end of the spectrum are those in the midst of changes within their life or family and who seek solace. And a great many are drawn by a curiosity to learn about this faith that they have heard of, read about or...maybe heard a joke referencing our less than traditional faith. All are welcome.

This year, our first with Rev Bob Janis, has seen a swelling of the pews and an energy and excitement that we have missed. Old friends are returning as new ones arrive. This year we have had 50 visitors who have signed the visitor info slip and probably a similar number who did not leave their name. When a contact form is available a call or email is sent wishing them welcome and hoping they return. They receive another message inviting them to the monthly First Connections where visitors are encouraged to meet after the service "Under the Stairs". This year we have had 17 new attendees during the 5 sessions that were held. In early May, Rev Bob offered "The Journey", a two-session

program for new members and those considering membership. Hopefully USH will have 8 new members at the New Member ceremony to be held May 19.

Outreach is critical to USH growth. We are seeing long-time members return to the pews and some of those are folks who were contacted by active members and encouraged to attend a service. Many of us have old friends we would like to see again. A phone call or note can make a difference.

More immediate outreach is welcome when we engage newcomers during coffee hour and share our own experiences of USH. This year we have added blue coffee cups for visitors as an easy way to identify them as people who might enjoy a friendly chat. Reaching out offers a beacon of welcome.

-Laurie Kelliher

Caring Network Sub-Council

Chair: Janice Newton

Active Members: **Chair:** Janice Newton **Members:** Laura Cipriano, Lucille Giammatteo, Louise Harmon, Nancy Kemmerer, David Newton, Nancy Reed, Mimi Stevenson. In addition, there are many supporting members whom we can call on when help is needed. We are very grateful for this help.

We are always looking for folks who would be available to drive members to and/or from Sunday services and to medical appointments, etc. Please contact me if you would be interested in being on a list of potential drivers whom we could call if a ride was requested. Contact me at janicecnewton@gmail.com or 860-212-6923.

We continue to knit (rather slowly) Comfort Shawls. We desperately need more knitters!! There are only two of us now. If you would be willing to knit, please contact Nancy Reed or me. If you, or someone you know, needs a Comfort Shawl, please contact Nancy Reed or me. We have distributed 315 shawls since we began knitting Comfort Shawls in the spring of 2002. We had about 20 knitters at that time! There is a "Community Shawl" in a tray by the bench in the lobby. Feel free to knit some on it. Be sure to add your name to the list of knitters in the note pad in the tray. That shawl is in its second year and would very much like to be completed!

This past year has seen a number of losses of our members and friends. The Caring Network has provided receptions for eight Memorial Services. We have changed the previous arrangement of a suggested fee of \$5/person. Instead for members, we gratefully accept donations if the family desires to make one. There will continue be a fee, amount to be determined, for non-members.

We are very grateful to Evan Williams and Susan Hope for all the work they put in to care for the Memorial Gardens. The memorial Gardens have never looked better!! We look forward to having an enclosure for our "Wind Phone" built this Spring. Watch the E-News for an announcement.

The Caring Network has a table set up in Fellowship Hall during Fellowship Hour. Each Sunday we are there to meet new folks and to be available if personal contact is desired.

During the year we have continued to have monthly meetings in person as well and on Zoom. Anyone interested in learning more about the Caring Network is urged to speak to a member and/or attend one of our meetings. We generally meet monthly in Murray at 12:15 PM on a Sunday when Rev. Bob is available to attend. The dates for our meetings will be published in the E-News. Our meetings generally are 1 hour. All are welcome. Our goal is to be a Caring Community.

We are very grateful for the support and participation of Rev. Bob.

Council on Social Justice

Chair: Judy Sullivan

CT UU Social Justice Ministry

USH has joined with other Unitarian Universalist congregations to create an informal statewide social justice ministry to use our collective power to create change. Projects are now being developed to work together on aspects of voter registration and getting out the vote for the 2024 election.

Good Neighbor Offerings (GNO)

The “Share the Plate” program continued this year and we have welcomed speakers from local organizations to share their mission and purpose. We have enjoyed growing and nurturing relationships with these organizations which strengthens our giving as a spiritual practice. Sunday offerings unless otherwise designated are split 50/50 between the current months GNO and USH.

<u>2024</u>		<u>GNO/USH</u>
September	PFLAG\$	\$891/\$650
October	Hawkwing	\$1519/\$701
November	IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services)	\$1507/\$607
December	CT Foodshare	\$1663/\$542
January	Operation Fuel	\$1030/\$365
February	IREJN (Interreligious Eco-Justice Network)	\$1109/\$724
March	The Village for Families & Children	\$1527/\$713
April	Brother Carl Hardrick Institute	\$1583/\$644
May	Keep the Promise	ongoing

Race Matters

- Social Justice Movie Night’s showing of the James Baldwin documentary, “I Am Not Your Negro” in November was well attended. Gloria Mengual introduced the movie and then followed the movie with directed small group conversations. It was described as “a rich evening with wonderful conversations”.
- *The Sum of Us* podcast discussions, also led by Gloria Mengual, meet via Zoom and cover stories from Heather McGhee’s travels across the United States. These include environmental racism, voting rights, minimum wage, reproductive rights, and immigration, among others. This series meets eight evenings between January and June.

EqUUal Access & Disability Justice led by Gloria Bent

USH seeks to be inclusive and welcoming to all persons while providing the opportunity for full participation in all aspects of congregational life. We strive to identify and improve areas in our building, grounds and policies that limit accessibility, involvement and contributions of all. To that end, a policy regarding Service/Emotional Support Animals (*separate attachment) has been established.

The committee has also performed a review of the building and grounds which included:

- Elevators and lifts
- Lighting
- Signage
- Parking
- Outdoor routes of travel, curbs, accessible playground and memorial garden.

A list of needed improvements has been identified, and working with the Building and Grounds Committee, repairs/renovations are ongoing.

Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry – Diana Heymann

The Unitarian Society of Hartford has been providing support to The Horace Bushnell Childrens' Food Pantry since the 1980's. They survive by writing grants that are available at the State and Federal level. This year, State Grants have been difficult to come by.

We give food items year-round. We also provide new and gently worn winter coats during the cold months. We also give the Pantry cash whenever we collect it from members and friends. When we make a cash donation, the Pantry staff are able to buy exactly what they need at or often much below cost. In these days of high food costs, the giving of cash is "An extra special blessing" according to the person in charge.

Noah Webster Micromagnet Society School Ministry - Peter Meny

Mission: To form healthy connections with students at Noah Webster School through language arts tutoring once a week throughout the school year.

At present we have only one member working with Noah Webster students. Next year we hope to rebuild this ministry by recruiting more USH members to get involved.

Fern Street Food Ministry

USH volunteers continue to participate with the Universalist Church of West Hartford packing for the Backpack Program. Every week, 146 bags of food are packed and delivered to local schools to support weekend access to healthy food.

Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA)

- USH hosted House Meetings in March with co-hosts Rev. AJ Johnson, The Urban Hope Refuge Church and Pastor Jeff Powell, New Antioch Baptist Church. 56 participants were divided into 6 groups to identify and share personal stories of issues that affect our community.
- Rev. Jocelyn Gardner Spencer, GHIAA Lead Organizer, was the USH Pulpit guest on March 24.
- Environmental Justice: USH members have worked with GHIAA to hold the MIRA (Materials Innovation and Recycling) Dissolution Authority responsible for protecting the remaining funds. We advocate for the reserve funds to be used for toxic clean up to salvage and reclaim the site for future community benefit.

Service/Emotional Support Animal Policy

USH seeks to be inclusive and welcoming to all persons, including those with disabilities or mental disorders. To that end, the presence of service and emotional support animals are welcome. 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.

The Village for Families and Children

Joanne Orlando, Liaison

It is with pleasure that I can report that the Unitarian Society of Hartford continues to support The Village for Families and Children. During the summer of 2023 USH participated in The Village Uniform Fundraiser for the 12th year, donating \$2,059.25 to help Hartford children return to school with pride. The Village was the recipient of our Good Neighbor Offering in March 2024 and an additional \$1,527 was donated to The Village. USH is recognized in The Village Annual Report. Derek Slap, Vice President for Development, returned to USH for the March 10th 2024 Sunday morning's service, to talk about the new Urgent Crisis Center at The Village. I will be attending the Annual Meeting of The Village for Families and Children on April 16, 2024 to represent USH. The Village for Families and Children knows they can count on USH as a steadfast supporter and expresses their gratitude for our care.

Council on Spiritual Life

Spirit Life Council Annual Report 2024

Rick Tsukasa, Chair

General: The Spirit Life Council of the Unitarian Society of Hartford (USH) is made up of the Music Department, Religious Education Department, the Worship Associates, Chancel Arts and the Spirit Life Program. For the most part this council's work is centered on the rituals that are the public offerings of the Unitarian Society of Hartford. Mainly the Sunday Services and the liberal education of our Youth.

However, here at USH, over the last 20 or so years this church has been moving through a period of time filled with living through major changes. When one steps way back and looks at the changes, in congregational demographics, in leadership and even at its aging building one can see its shifts and adjustments as a microcosm of our American Culture. Even changes in the overall direction of UU leadership, are a reflection of major shifts in all areas of American Life. Here at USH we to are in an effort to preserve what we value in our collective Unitarian Universalist experience while creating a society culture that is relevant and as flexible as the times we live in. This has been and is, not easy in part because it is generational in magnitude.

This is an important time in the life of USH...the baby boomers are well...Seniors...we are, we have, been putting the finishing touches on so many aspects of our lives; including our Unitarian Society of Hartford.

Having said that I think that I can declared that the Spirit Life of the Unitarian Society of Hartford has found its footing and has stabilized. We have turned the corner and are now able to imagine and to feel good about the possibilities of our tomorrows here at USH.

We have found a minister that is a match for us; a particular minister whose remarkable creativity and bravery has opened the pathways for the congregation to once again ...well show up...we are on our way of finding our post Covid identity and voice, as a church, as a spiritual community and as a family. We have a staff that is remarkable in their creativity, their dedications, their capacity to support our

congregation. Hanging around during the week and watching the comings and goings here we are energized, we are inspired....so much is happening.

We are growing yet we have become a small church with small church member resources. Yet this is a place where the Spirit Life of the Church has become a sweet place to go on Sundays. And as our programming grows our sweet places can be found on the other days of the week. We are getting better and better at sharing and meeting of our mutual needs. We are getting better and better at understanding what our needs are and also our capacity to meet those that need our way. We have much to look forward to over the next year as we lay the foundation for the next era of UU life.

Religious Education at USH

Religious Education at USH has not been immune from the effects of the Covid epidemic. Our children's developmental lives have a huge hole in their continuity of passage from each stage of life to another. The socialization and mutuality of the interdependence of social and individual emotional growth has been fragmented. Our church's education program population and progress is missing an entire generation of bonding. We are facing (as are all school systems) the need to not only heal the holes of lost experiences but to simultaneously begin anew...to raise once again children from the nursery up...at each stage of life until once again when we look at our church's RE program, we see full classes of every stage of childhood life...talking, playing, with one another...and making that background noise that comes from the playgrounds of a healthy community...this is the challenge of our age...to rebuild a place where children and their caretakers can find a place...a liberal place...where life's adventures and mysteries can be explored with love. My thanks to Annie Witzler for her efforts and leadership.

(Note: USH is currently searching for a Coordinator of Religious Education)

Chancel Arts

Chancel Arts continue to produce the visual focus of our Sunday Services and they do so without much fanfare but it is a labor of love and when one thinks about it...making a painting or sculpture every week is a remarkable task...thanks to them...I think of them as kind of like our church ghosts that do wonderful things with no one is looking...

With the addition of the proposed Chancel Lighting System the work and art of this group will become more appreciated and understood as a valuable aspect of our services.

Music

The music of a church is a very complicated creature that shows up in many different forms and has many different functions throughout the life of our congregation.

During a church service it can be as simple as offering a break between the spoken words...it can be an important mood and subject transition between elements of a service...it can be entertainment where all one has to do is just sit back and enjoy or it is a chance for all, holding their hymnals to become

active in the celebration...all of these can be what music does. On a deeper level music can draw out our souls into places of memory, experiences of love, sadness, joy, play and so on...it is a place where we are being together in a shared experience.

For many music is church...it is a place where some feel and participate in their spiritual life...sometimes alone..sometimes with others. The range of music's involvement and importance in our church's life is huge and no one person can supply the activities that can meet all the need we have for music. Our personal taste for the kind of music is likewise vast and on any given day...an impossible task to satisfy all.

However, we are a community and when we look at how many kinds of ways that music shows up we do have a music program...in part because we are a place where if you have a desire to make music you can find a place here at USH to make it. There is a sing along group, a Madaline Group, a First Thursday Service where different music happens, there is choir, and of course the Meeting House Presents Concerts as well as the occasional special event like the Dix piano performances. And of course, there is our very talented musician and music director Sam Moffett.

But in large...our music program...is a community offering and its range and opportunities is a community responsibility.

Spirit Life Program

The enigmatic group call Spirit Life which has been producing spiritually oriented programming for the three UU churches for the last 6 or more years has continued to do so. However...with recent times and the addition of new programming in the UU churches they are re assessing its program offerings for the coming year and have not yet published them.

Ministerial Offerings

Although the minister's activities do not fall into the Spirit Council's structure Rev Bob Janis has created an environment where there have been numerous offerings that he has created that has vastly contributed to the overall spiritual life of this church. These offerings can also be considered adult religious education activities. His work has filled a gap that at one time was part of our volunteer programming. He has led a Poetry Writing Group, a First Thursday Vesper Inspired Service, A New Member Education Class, faceted WA discussions, and the intangible but incredibly important, his presence at meetings throughout our churches lives. All of this has done much to build and invite spirit back into our USH's atmosphere.

Worship Associates Annual Report

Chair: Sue Smolski

Members: Miriam Byroade, Laurie Kelliher, Margaret Leicach, Peter Meny, Michael Michaud, Judy Robbins, Carol Simpson, Sue Smolski-Coordinator, Rick Tsukada

Overview: The worship theme for the Summer and September was "Love In Action" and in October it became "Seeking, Sharing, Soaring ". This dedicated group of Worship Associates embodied both of these themes, individually and collectively, throughout this church year.

Reviewing Goals for this church year:

1. Joyfully welcome Reverend Bob Janis and further develop shared ministry: The first part of this goal was easily accomplished and the second part has begun, is evolving, and is ongoing.

The Worship Associates appreciated Reverend Bob's style of acclimating to an established and skilled group of worship associates. We have welcomed, adapted to, and appreciate his collaborative approach to creating worship. He has responded to the longstanding expressed request to restore an educational element to our monthly meetings. It is anticipated that this successful collaboration will continue to deepen and grow.

2. Explore developing a Worship Committee: This goal was premature, yet functionally, partially met.

There is no Worship Committee at this time. The Worship Associate Meetings which include the Worship Associates and the Minister have met monthly to plan and critique worship, create a worship theme for the year, to identify pulpit speakers for the two Sundays a month the minister is not in the pulpit, and to discuss topics related to worship.

Last Fall, Annie Witzler, Interim Religious Education Coordinator, met with the group to discuss the new RE Curriculum which would include one Sunday a month when all RE participants would be attending the entire Sunday Service. The first Sunday of the month was designated "RE Focused Sunday".

In March and May, the meeting time was modified and Sam Moffett, Director of Music Ministries, was able to attend the meetings which focused on planning services for the spring and then, summer and fall. The resulting brainstorming and synergy fueled our creativity, strengthened collaboration, and has enhanced the quality of our worship services.

Additionally, the Coordinator communicated ongoingly with Chancel Artists, Social Justice Chair, Director of Music Ministries, Director of Religious Education, the Tech Team, the Chair of Spirit Life Council, our Office Administrator, our President, other Board members, and made the initial contacts to the pulpit guests who were not members or staff.

In the future, whether a Worship Committee will be established and how this might evolve will be guided by the incoming Worship Associate Coordinator, Michael Michaud and Reverend Bob.

3. Continue to expand the number of lay pulpit guests from our congregation: By the end of this church

year, there will have been nineteen (19) services with lay pulpit guests - eleven (11) lay members of the congregation; six (6) Worship Associates and two (2) by UUSE-Manchester lay members. Another two services were shared with lay people who were not Worship Associates and either Reverend Bob or a Worship Associate. This number represents six congregants who are not Worship Associates and who have returned to our pulpit during this church year.

New Initiatives: Reverend Bob conducted a two-part workshop on the Art of Worship, which emphasized sermon writing with no expectation of being a pulpit speaker. Five Worship Associates attended the sessions.

New Initiative: The Coordinator wrote two articles for the Enews in April inviting congregants to utilize our denomination's free pulpit to speak their truth and shared comments about the experience from recent lay pulpit speakers who were not Worship Associates. To date, two congregants, who are returning to our pulpit, have volunteered for the next church year.

4. Increase the number of worship associates: Miriam Byroade became a Worship Associate in September and is leading worship with Reverend Bob. She has made a smooth adjustment to this role and is a welcome addition to the group. It is her decision if and when she will learn the more expanded role of crafting worship services with speakers who are pulpit guests.

5. Complete the Worship Associate Handbook: The new handbook was completed in January. A process for updating it annually has been established and will begin in June. Each Worship Associate has a copy and there are copies in the Minister's study and the Archives. The Office Administrator created and maintains the electronic Handbook documents.

Ongoing endeavors:

Sharing Lay Pulpit Resources with UUSE in Manchester: The first two exchanges this past summer were very successful. Carol Simpson continues as our liaison with UUSE. This coming summer there will be one pulpit exchange. It is anticipated that this sharing of resources will continue on an annual basis.

Online Worship Calendar: This spreadsheet has been modified and continues to be a helpful tool for timely communication among members of the worship team. Viewing access now includes the Chancel Artists, Board members, RE Coordinator, and Worship Associates. The Minister, Worship Associate Coordinator, Director of Music Ministries, and Office Administrator are the editors. It is anticipated that the use of this tool will continue.

Editing of the Order of Service Inserts: The Worship Associate Coordinator has continued as the Editor. Guidelines for submission of items and a deadline were established to facilitate the timely completion of this weekly paper document. Next year, this function will no longer be done by the Worship Associate Coordinator. Sue Smolski will continue as Editor of the Insert for the next church year.

Worship Associate Representatives to USH Committees:

Committee on Ministry-Judy Robbins

Safety Committee-Margaret Leicach

Soul Matters, USH interface-Laurie Kelliher

New Initiative: A new adhoc committee of Worship Associates, Rick Tsukada and Michael Michaud, has been formed to explore new options to convert our chancel pulpit into one that is safely accessible for speakers of varying heights.

Worship Enhancements:

The following items were purchased: four matching lighter weight wood bowls for the candle ritual; four matching stands for the candle ritual bowls, and a black, flame retardant covering for the table next to the pulpit. Two shoji screens will be purchased to enlarge the worship area in Fellowship Hall for the summer.

New Worship Associate Coordinator: Michael Michaud begins his two-year term on July 1, 2024.

Goals for 2024-2025:

Beyond, collaborating with our new Coordinator and sharing ministry with Reverend Bob, additional goals are the province of the new Coordinator.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Smolski

Worship Associate Coordinator

USH Board of Directors and Staff

USH Board of Directors 2023-2024

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USH Council Personnel

Unitarian Society of Hartford - Council Personnel

Nourishing Spirit, Building Community, Working for Justice

