

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting September 12, 2023

Location: Zoom

Quorum NO ___ YES X

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

Orders of Business

6:48 p.m.– Dana called the meeting to order.

- Dana - Opening words/Welcome
- Nancy – Reading: some religious denominations’ interpretation of fire.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- **Approval of July 2023 Board Meeting Minutes – Motion:** Rick made motion to accept minutes. Nancy seconded. Unanimous approval.
- **Assignment of chair for Financial Guideline Subcouncil –** During July Board meeting, Jim V., Jon C. and Sherry M. agreed to serve on the Financial Guideline Committee. No vote was taken as to who would chair this committee **Motion:** Nancy made motion for Jim to chair subcouncil. Jim agreed. Tina seconded. Vote in favor: unanimous.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Rev. Bob – Staff update and Report on Board Retreat**
Board retreat in Springfield area – interesting conversation of who we were/are as a congregation. Discussed challenges faced by millennials. He has been thinking about our goals – what are the signs of things going well in our congregation? See Rev.

Bob's report below meeting minutes for staff update and more on the following: Goals he identified: 1. Staff satisfaction; 2. Positive bonds; 3. Opportunities for growth; 4. Culture of acceptable risk and return, and 5. Enjoy ourselves. Another focus of his board report: Staff. He is goal setting with each staff member. Presently focused on religious education coordinator role; he is recommending occasional Sundays off for staff.

- **Judy – Memorials - Board involvement** – It would be nice to send sympathy cards from the Board after a family's loss. Dana: board manual notes Board president should send sympathy card. Janice Newton noted that she has sent a sympathy card to all families who lost someone.
- **Jim – Fundraising and regifting sale**- Regifting raised \$3,882.00 last year. Several years ago, rather than buy something they do not want, people were asked to make a donation. That worked well. Re: regifting – we may be able to have another regifting sale, which in the past, has been run by Green Sanctuary. In 2016, the *Golden Goose Letter* was created, noting the failure of an endowment over time. We've received over \$50,000 in gifts this year. Regifting is not particularly successful financially; however, one benefit is its community-building. **Nancy:** due to unspent Covid money, we're doing pretty well this year. That being said, we need to focus on building our endowment. Having an endowment/legacy campaign this Fall should be our focus. **David:** recommended that Sherry Manetta be added to the Endowment Committee; she has agreed to accept a three-year term to that committee. **Motion: Tina** made motion that Sherry be added as Endowment Committee member. Seconded by Nancy. Vote was unanimous. (*See Sherry Minetta's bio below Board Meeting minutes*) Nancy noted committee remains one person short. David explained he is working on expanding this committee. **Dana:** recommended that a younger generation person be added to this committee. **Rev. Bob:** *Notes added in Zoom chat:* Summing up conversation online and now; it sounds like these are our approximate criteria for fundraisers:
 1. Not too much work to set up.
 2. People really want to/will have fun setting it up
 3. Makes good money for congregation, without too much outlay
 4. Builds community – people gather, have fun; inspires others to become membersSome activities may not meet all 4 criteria, but if it meets a couple, seems worth it. Endowment should maybe take precedence this year, as a unique way to ensure congregational income long-term.

- **Paul – Soup supplies funding** – John Bengtson pays up front for Soup Sundays and is reimbursed; he cannot continue to do this. Is there any way for USH to cover expenses up front for this? **Rick:** this should come from the RE budget, since Soup Sunday activity falls under that. **Dana** proposed that Karolina set up a Soup Sunday fund within the RE budget. Funds need to be allotted asap, since Soup Sunday is this coming Sunday, September 30. Nancy, Jim and the Newtons donated \$100 each to cover John’s grocery expenses for September.
- **David – Sewer pump update** – *See David’s notes about this below.* They were not able to complete the work. As soon as 440 v one comes in, they will complete the work. We have half an installation done at this point.

COUNCIL CHAIR REPORTS

- **Administration** - *Paul Cipriano* – Switchover to keypad for entry is completed. (*See complete report below*) **Highlights:** Second active shooter alarm can be installed at no extra charge. Security cameras already have done good work for us, helping avoid unneeded visits to USH to check things out. We are considering another camera for the parking lot. Intercom system is coming soon. Not covered: Red Cross first aid training or purchase of defibrillator. Police recommended we lease defibrillator.
- **Jon – Treasurer’s report** – *submitted report (see below).* Employer participation agreement has been updated. Last Sunday, a family donation related to a marriage 50 years ago resulted in a \$1,000.00 donation to USH. How should this be attributed? **Rev. Bob** recommended general fund. **Rick:** unrestricted endowment seems like a good place. There is close to \$10,000 in the minister’s discretionary fund. **Jim:** endowment could be very viable; Nancy agreed that these funds go to the endowment. Jim made **motion** to put donation in endowment; Nancy seconded motion. Vote in favor unanimous.
- **Community Within** – *Tina Davies* – Karolina and Tina will be featuring piece in E-news about how Covid has been making a reappearance, along with a reminder to be cautious. Will note that masks are available at Welcome table.
- **Social Justice** – *Judy Sullivan* – will have a report for next board meeting; group has not met during the summer
- **Spiritual Life** – *Rick Tsukada* – (*Highlights from the Spiritual Life divisions are included in Rick’s report below*) – Beyond report-outs noted below, Rick shared some ideas related to shared ministry: He noted that our congregation has repeatedly gone through the minister/no minister experience. Shared ministry – looking at how this affects each of our areas – how the minister interacts with each of

us and how we do our work together – is important. It is vital to have a process and structure to continue doing our business so that we can roll with any changes, distributing responsibilities within the congregation, as needed. Learning the management of minister’s role is receiving our attention. It’s a conversation now, but we need to go into further detail on how this works – our continued functioning and thriving, both with and/or without a minister. **Rick** suggested putting the shared ministry discussion on the agenda for next month. **Dana** – this seems like it should be an ongoing discussion.

- **Worship Associates Request - Dana:** Sue Smolski would like to be sent list of Board members who will present Board update during service the third Sunday of each month. Rev. Bob asked that each assigned Board presenter reach out to him in advance to hopefully create some synchronicity with the service’s theme whenever possible. Board members signed up for this schedule:

October 15th	Rick Tsukada	February 18th	Laurie Kelliher
November 19th	Nancy Kemmerer	March 17th	Jim Venneman
December 17th	Paul Cipriano	April 21st	Jon Covault
January 21st	Judy Sullivan	May 19th	Gloria F. Mengual
		June 16 th	Tina Davies

- **Human Resources – Juneteenth as paid holiday: Dana:** now that Juneteenth is a national holiday, should this be a paid holiday for USH staff? **Judy – Motion:** that we make Juneteenth a paid staff holiday. Nancy- seconded. Unanimous board vote in favor.

GUEST COMMENTS

David Newton reported out on the Endowment Committee’s responsibility to adopt a policy on investments, taking into consideration the current needs of the Society, preservation of the permanent funds’ worth, original restrictions on gifts and bequests, the economic climate, and the future outlook. (*See more Policy on Investments details below Board Meeting minutes*).

MOTION TO ADJOURN – Jim: Motion to adjourn at 8:54 p.m. Rick seconded motion. Unanimous vote to adjourn.

MINISTER, TREASURER, ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL, SPIRIT LIFE AND ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE WRITTEN REPORTS SUBMITTED FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 2023 BOARD MEETING:

I. USH Ministerial Board Report from Rev. Bob Janis

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

Getting to know a lot of the key players, past and present at the congregation and reading up on the history. We had an excellent board retreat. It began with an insightful conversation around what made our congregation what it is, our “e pluribus unum” diversity and community. At the end of the session, we started to think about goals for the year – I’d love to know everyone’s thoughts on this. I have finalized my thoughts around goals, but five potential goals, in no particular order, started to take shape:

1. **Happy Staff.** We have a great staff team this year. This came first to my mind because I’m looking to meet with every staff member to set goals and performance plans for the year ahead. And while I’m all about setting our expectations for staff performance high, I also want to make sure they have the conditions to thrive here.
2. **Positive Bonds.** Trying to create the environment where “positive bonds” of excitement, appreciation, love and joy grow between people in the congregation. Connection Circles, Spirit-Life, creativity groups, Sundays all help with this. The congregation has been doing a good job of building these bonds without a minister, and I think now we can help catalyze even more of these connections.
3. **Opportunities for Growth.** This is often a catchphrase, and rightfully so...I think for this year, we should maybe think about opportunities for personal and spiritual growth first and foremost, even above and beyond opportunities for numerical growth (though we should create these too – perhaps especially focusing on families).
4. **Culture of Acceptable Risk and Return.** We’re seeing people return to the congregation, which is wonderful, but it’s not the only type of “return” I mean. Many may feel emotionally unsafe at this congregation, and it would be great to foster a congregation safe enough that people can take risks and make small mistakes – say the wrong thing, any kind of little oops – and be able to say “sorry ‘bout that” and be able to stay in fellowship.
5. **Enjoy Life.** L’chaim! People are here voluntarily. There’s nothing wrong with congregational life being fun – people already get this here, I think, and we can definitely keep the conviviality strong.

As I say, none of these goals, but they seem like a good place to start. I'm already finding little ways we can help make these goals happen – see the other sections of this report.

The RE program has been under a lot of scrutiny recently. To the best of my knowledge our Interim Coordinator of Religious Education doesn't have a signed contract/job description; under the draft job description she was here until June 2022. I propose we keep this simple:

- Offer Annie a job description/contract through this year, ending June 2024. I've spoken to Annie about this and she's in agreement and together we can get a job description, that basically covers what she's doing already
- Do everything possible to help our Interim Coordinator thrive this congregational year. I know this goes without saying; but it's something I want to pay attention to as supervisor.
- In Winter/Spring of this coming year, make a decision about RE leadership. We need to talk about how this happens – it's complicated to have an established staff member competing against outside candidates, for both parties. But that's not to say it's not doable.

Sundays

Very positive feedback on both minister- and lay-led Sundays. We're off to a good start! It's a dream working with these seasoned group of WAs and with Sam.

I'd like to propose we figure out a way to give our staff occasional Sundays off – I'm thinking specifically Karolina and Annie here; I know Sam gets some Sundays off and I'm not sure if other staff would need or want this. And I know staff are expected to work Sundays and rightfully so – it's the most important day of the congregation's week – but without *ever* having a weekend off, it's hard to have a family life, and I think we can work that in. For Karolina, it's relatively straightforward – I believe she's already slated to take a Sunday off a month, she simply hasn't been doing so. She proposes keeping her off Sundays regular, as the last Sunday of the month. The only responsibilities that we'd absolutely have to take care of are running the Zoom, and letting people in the building. People could be easily trained to do both.

For Annie, it's a bit more challenging. Heading an RE program, even just for the Sunday hour, takes some training. But I think it's vital we do that, and not just for Annie's sake – it helps us spread the knowledge when it comes to Religious Education which helps us long-term build a better program. If the Board approves that both staff take occasional Sundays off, I will work with Karolina, Annie and lay leaders to make that happen.

Programming and Social Justice

To help connect with families, Annie and I are planning to host a get-together of parents in our program after services on September 24. I'd like to brainstorm with them ways that USH could have a positive impact on their lives, not just on Sundays but beyond. One vague idea I already wanted to float to them before hearing it sketched out in greater detail at our board retreat: some congregations do a "Kids Night Out" where, once a month, children can gather at the chapel for 2-3 hours of programming – something simple, like crafts or a movie. The *other* draw of kids night out is the *parents* get babysitting, and can go out and enjoy a date night – a major attraction for many parents. We could suggest a voluntary donation of \$10-20 for this, without anyone blinking an eye. The challenge is finding the 2-3 people each month to staff this, and plan it. Just one idea, I'm sure we'll come up with more.

First Tuesday Discussion went very well, I think. Looking forward to the monthly poetry workshop.

I'd like to be at least a sporadic attendee at several groups, as time allows and if the occasional presence of the minister is helpful and not too much of a distraction.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

As many have noted, there seem to be a *lot* of funerals lately. My heart goes out to all those mourning, some of them several long-time friends. And I'm grateful to lay leaders and colleagues who have managed to lead the funerals, provide receptions, and care for the families.

Been making occasional outside pastoral visits though a lot seems to get done in the office, which is convenient. But if there's anyone who you think I might pop in on – especially those who can't make it to USH easily – please feel free to drop a word in my ear.

II. Treasurer Report submitted by Jon Covault – 9/23

UUA Retirement Plan

Our revised USH/UUA retirement plan Employer Participation Agreement (EPA) approved at the July Board meeting was accepted by the UUA. The revised EPA conditions will take effect at the beginning of 2024

USH financial account activity for July-August

Endowment - \$1,225 in endowment memorial gifts. The only withdrawals have been monthly transfer of \$4,453 in support of the operating budget.

Schwab – only activity was interest income of \$1,149 over the July-August period.

M&T - August 31 balance of \$65,515

The FY24 Quarter 1 summary of activity in our financial accounts will be provided at the next board meeting

FY24 Budget as approved at the June Board meeting is posted on the USH website. **Stewardship Pledges** (and contributions) have been relatively stable (flat) for past 4 years

FY Pledged		Pledge Donations
23-24	\$279,614	
22-23	\$282,522	\$295,359
21-22	\$275,651	\$288,991
20-21	\$224,295	\$276,747

III. Administration Council Report submitted by Paul Cipriano 9/23

A second active shooter alarm will be installed at the pulpit and will be monitored 24/7 at no cost to USH through Church Mutual Insurance

The camera system, keyless entry, and camera doorbell are now all installed and fully functional and board members if they haven't seen it yet can see it in the office on Karolina's desk. The e-news will have an update to let congregants know they can come by the office to pick up their door code. Karolina is currently only collecting front door keys in exchange for the key code.

The security cameras have already been of use by enabling remote views of the meeting house when the heat sensors in the lobby were triggered, saving unnecessary trips to the meeting house. The roof top drains can now be viewed by camera instead of having to be physically inspected by someone walking on the roof.

Security committee is meeting this coming Sunday after service to discuss among other things, what entry doors to USH should remain with key access, installation at the main entrance sidewalk of planters which will provide protection for the building and occupants from vehicles in the parking lot.

They will also be working on a prototype of the annex of the 12 different types of emergencies which require a coordinated response that were identified at a previous meeting.

We are also moving ahead with the installation of an intercom system throughout the entire building using USH's existing phone system. This will

enable communication in the event of an emergency with all phones and two loudspeakers which will be installed in the building, most likely in the lobby and fellowship hall.

We are considering one more camera to view the parking lot from the office. All these items are items USH will be reimbursed for by the security grant once installation is completed.

Two items we applied for funding for were not approved in the security grant application as they did not pertain to security were first aid training through the red cross and the purchase of a defibrillator(s) for the meeting house. The Hartford Police Department recommended leasing a defibrillator through a private company that inspects and maintains them annually for us.

The Board may want to consider a motion to approve moving ahead with these two items by researching the costs of each and interest among the congregation in first aid instruction and the training in how to use a defibrillator.

In the Security workshop these were items that the congregation considered important for the safety of all who enter our doors.

IV. Spirit Life Council Report submitted by Rick Tsukada 9/23

The heads of the Spirit life Council "departments" have been actively planning for this coming 2023-24 year. Each of the areas, Worship Associates, Music Ministry, Religious Education and the independent Spirit Life program have engaged with the two new major aspects of their church programming. The two new and important areas:

- We have a minister for at least a year
- We are in the process of understanding and building a "Shared Ministry" structure.

There are a number of factors during the next year that make critical this council's shared ministry work. UU ministers in general are in short supply and their career paths suggest they are staying in one church 6 - 7 years before moving on. Secondly, our church is now a small church and our programming and needs should reflect this reality. In short, the "Shared Ministry" is an experimental structure that will hopefully improve our flexibility to adjust successfully to whatever changes our congregation faces. Each of the Spirit Life divisions is looking to build programs with this understanding: it is a skill set to become a flexible and reality-based program.

During this next year, my goal is to structure the Spirit Life Council's work to become a flexible, reality-based program delivery council. The hope is to reorganize each section as a team with a team leader, whether paid or volunteer; no one should be alone in this community. Everyone should have others to lift the other end of the board.

Spirit Life Council Division Reports

Music: Sam Moffett

I have neglected this area this summer. Peter Meny had a conversation with Sam last year about Sam's ideas, plans and needs. Sam's and Bob's working relationship will help shape this year's music ministry. The new music budget also reflects some of Sam's ideas and goals, including an effort to have a group singing experience (choir) as part of our service. My next step is to see what I can do (board/congregation) to support Sam's efforts. If anyone has thoughts or creative initiatives around music, please let me know; I will see what we can do to get them into play, if possible.

Musically there are two music listening events coming up soon, a free to the public Organ concert, sponsored by the Hall family, on October 15th and an open piano rehearsal by Benjamin Dix on October 28th. Mr. Dix is a well-known and very accomplished concert pianist who literally "got to Carnegie Hall."

Worship Associates: Sue Smolski

Like the other departments, the WA's are planning and working to fully incorporate the needs of having a Shared Ministry role. This includes working closely with Rev. Bob, who has attended the WA's monthly meetings; they greatly appreciate this. Both Sam (music) and Annie Witzler (RE) have attended their meetings as well. These meetings, include practical scheduling tasks as well as important critical discussion on the nature and importance of Worship, especially focused on Sunday services. However it should be noted that the sense of the year is being captured by a graphic posting of our Orders of Service in the Fellowship Hall entry area. It starts again, now, with the posting of our recent Ingathering/Water Ceremony service. This is a great visual addition to our sense of worship at USH and demonstrates our continuity, depicting both our past and future. Thanks, Sue Smolski.

The Council is working with Building and Grounds to Improve the lighting in the Fellowship Hall foyer to enhance the visibility of the Society's Activity and Announcement Posting Board, as well as the above-mentioned Order of Service Graphic Panel.

Chancel Arts: Paula Bleck

I have really neglected this aspect of the Council's work. Although I have had "coffee hour" conversations with Paula Bleck (the primary 'chief chef' of this very visible aspect of our church), its organization and functions remain a mystery to me. However, as evidenced by the recent Cloud and Rain Chancel Art, which beautifully supported the Ingathering, the importance of this area cannot be underestimated. I am also reminded that even though this part of our spiritual practice mostly shows up on Sundays, it likely is the first thing a visitor sees when coming into our church. Chancel Arts is a creative extension to our very active Arts community. I will, like with Sam, get into conversation with Paula to see if the Board (congregation) can do more to support this very visible part of USH's life.

Religious Education: Annie Witzler

This is the area where I have devoted most attention during the summer. The RE program has become an area of congregational life that has drawn much attention and speculation. Most people see the RE program as an important representation of a healthy and vital congregation. However, as the effects of UU demographic changes over the past few decades become more evident, we notice changes in our USH family. Our RE program is no longer as robust as it once was. Interim Religious Education Coordinator Annie Witzler has been needing to plan and adjust to the inconsistent attendance and lower numbers. Our work is to develop a program that is truly flexible and useful to those children and adult caregivers (parents, grandparents, etc).

Annie has now secured some staff. The hope is that previous efforts to create a RE committee will result in a working staff. At least three adult volunteers will be engaging as leaders with the youth group. Annie is combining both the nursery and the children's program within the same room. She has engaged with Rev. Bob as a supportive resource and guide, as well as working with me to grow a working structure and build resources. Annie has begun to hold staff meetings with her crew, which is so important to developing team consciousness... all really good stuff.

The youth group program has begun pulling in other congregational members with expertise and interests to become program resource - people like USH Board President Dana, with his "pagan" spiritual practice, a yoga teacher, a nationally known equity trainer, and our own Rev. Bob. If any of you would be interested in facilitating a "one off" class with our youth, let Annie know. The Soup making Sunday with John Brancoto will continue and will hopefully expand to include other parental participation.

We are beginning to collect data and planning information as we embark on a recordkeeping method, based on use of a daily planner to keep attendance, note program descriptions, hours worked and staffing.

We are currently in conversation with the Universalist Church of West Hartford (Fern Street) to bring a combined OWL (Our Whole Lives) program to our youth this Spring. The first step is to train one of our Youth Leaders, which should be happening soon. Another plan, in the early feasibility phase, is a Youth Conference involving area UU church youths, with a possible timeline of late Fall 2023 or Winter 2024.

A major addition to the RE program parameters is the expansion of RE at USH to include Adult Religious Education. Often referred to within UU circles as Life Long Religious Education (LLRE), Rev. Bob has already started a LLRE class for our congregation . We are also discussing with a leader of the independent Spirit Life program plans to soon provide a possible learning opportunity.

Potentially New Areas of Focus

Under our By-Laws, one area of USH Spirit Life Council is referred to as Rituals. Many kinds of rituals have been associated with the strength of a church's community. When one looks at how a church becomes the glue around which a community is centered, what may have been just called "activities" over time evolved into traditions, and therefore, an expected Ritual. How those rituals/activities are produced within a church differs from general community events. Traditionally one could say "we gather together in the sight of god...under its roof...surrounded by its love".

There are several activities I'm looking to "sponsor:"

1. Breaking Bread together opportunities: e.g. Thanksgiving Left Over Lunch
2. Vespers evening
3. Coffee House, where poetry and prayers and short essays can be shared
4. Hobby Show (stuff we do to amuse, distract, fill our time)
5. Potlatch, an activity of abundance
6. How we support things like Memorial Receptions, Births, Deaths, Weddings, Illness, Recovery from Illness -- about how we live our lives together ... our shared community experience.
7. In person discussions and/or workshops, with a spiritual inquiry foundation...Life, Death, Infinity Beauty, Awe, etc.
8. "Events Posse" A list of folks that can be invited to help with "as needed, one off" help...e.g. pot luck set up...picnic...fund raising happening...etc.

Endowment Committee Materials submitted by David Newton 9/23

Policy on Investments

Whereas, the Constitution requires a Policy on Investments from the Endowment Committee with various requirements, and

Whereas, the Policy is to be incorporated in the records of the Board of Directors, now therefore be it

Resolved, that the Policy on Investments appearing below is herewith accepted by the Board and shall be included in the Minutes as a matter of record.

Constitutional Relevant Information

The Endowment Committee shall annually adopt a policy on investments, which 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. Said policy shall be consistent with the funding ratios and reporting requirements set forth in Article XI and the Bylaws. This policy shall be incorporated in the records of the Board of Directors and included in the Annual Report.

Policy on Investments

The Endowment Committee will monitor the performance of UBS, our agent for management of Endowment funds that are not directly managed by the Endowment Committee. The management objective for the funds at UBS shall be to generate growth and income for Endowment funds to the benefit of USH through assessing investment risk for possible gains and losses associated with a reasonably aggressive deployment of resources among properly diversified cash instruments, stocks, and bonds. The original restrictions on gifts and bequests will be observed, the changing economic climate considered, and required funding ratios maintained. Required reports shall be timely prepared. Other matters as arise from time to time shall be considered.

Appointment of Sherry Manetta to a three year term on the Endowment Committee beginning on July 1, 2023

Whereas, Sherry Manetta is well qualified *(see associated bio below) for appointment to the Endowment Committee and

Whereas, She has indicated a willingness to serve USH in this capacity for a three year term, now therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Board herewith appoints Sherry Manetta to a three-year term on the Endowment Committee, with a start date of July 1, 2023, concurrent with the beginning of the fiscal year.

Sherry Manetta Bio

Sherry Manetta has been a member of USH for 12 years. She served as president of the USH Board during FY 2018 and FY 2019.

Sherry was an audit and consulting partner at Ernst & Young, where she was employed for fifteen years. She is a CPA and holds a BS in Math from Misericordia University and an MBA from Indiana University.

During her corporate career she served in CFO, CIO (Chief Information Officer) and COO positions, primarily in the insurance industry. Her investment experience specifically derives from several years as CFO of an Aetna pension business and COO of a risk management asset-liability modeling software and consulting business at Conning, Inc., a boutique asset management firm serving the insurance industry.

She has served on finance and investment committees of boards of directors in the insurance industry and within various nonprofit organizations.