# **Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting January 14, 2025**

Location: USH and Zoom Quorum NO\_\_\_YES\_ X\_

<b>Board Attendees</b>	Guests	Regrets
Nancy Kemmerer	David Newton	Rev. Bob
Rick Tsukada	Janice Newton	
Jon Covault		
Paul Cipriano		
Nina Elgo		
Jim Venneman		
Judy Sullivan		
Laurie Kelliher		
Laura Cipriano		
Gloria F. Mengual		
Jonathan (youth group)		

# **Orders of Business**

6:30 p.m. Nancy-called the meeting to order, followed by a reading.

**Approval of December 2024 Board Meeting Minutes** – Nina made motion to approve minutes. Jim seconded. Unanimous approval.

# **Treasurer's Report – Jon**

\*(See addendum below for financial summaries). Jon reviewed income/expenses balance sheet. USH is in the black. Rental income is on budget. Year end appeal - \$7,000 received to date. Some savings on salary - \$5,000 in savings. Natural gas budget spending is lower than expected. Fewer choral singers than expected resulted in further savings. Capital expense: railings - \$220 under budget.

# **Youth Group Update - Jonathan**

• Reported out on Zoom calls with other youth groups from Germany and other countries – Kenya, etc. Discussed the UU practices in their countries; most spoke English. Almost all in USH youth group

participated. Goal is to continue their relationship with UU youth groups from other countries.

# **Update on National Register of Historic Places Event - Nancy**

- Judy Robbins and Nancy are co-leading the planning. Plan is for more intimate celebration with USH folk and their invitees as a start point. Governor, state reps and senators to be invited, along with CT UU ministers. Planning is happening for open houses, probably on subsequent weekends, with docent tours. Date: March 23. Regular 10:30 am Sunday service, followed by luncheon.
- We are looking for a pro bono photographer for this event. Will be asking USH members/friends to take photo of the most memorable moment of this event.
- Volunteer of the Year Nomination let's maintain policy of not giving award again to someone who already received it. Board members please nominate someone and return form to Nancy. People nominated as a group in the past can be nominated again as individuals.

# **Council Reports**

# • Community Within - Laura

- Monday yoga had 18 participants.
- Reviewed all the activities happening. \* (See addendum below)
- Web page redesign is moving forward. See addendum for link to this our developing website.
- Arts/crafts/food event for Ukranian youth is being planned (more in addendum). Need to check with John B. on whether or not this will be a Soup Sunday. We have until 2:00 pm, when the renters come in. Is this event for our children, or will the group be bringing children in? More clarification needed. Don't want them to come in expecting an Easter mass. Need to ask Rev. Bob to communicate with them about this. Nina suggested advertising the craft fair part of this to attract visitors here.

# • Social Justice – Judy Sullivan

- Got in touch with Tanya Kimball regarding volunteer opportunities. Their web site shares potential roles and length of commitment.
- Peter Meny is only tutor left at Noah Webster School. He has found 3 folks interested in tutoring. Enews is publicizing this to see if other USH folk are interested.

 True Colors Conference in March is in the planning stages, to be held at UCONN campus in Storrs. We would like to promote this as a multiple UU-supported event.

# • Finance - Jim

- Year-end appeal raised \$7,000
- Endowment Update unrestricted is just under goal
- Capitol improvement plan- \$350,000
- Total end \$2.3 million at this point
- Drive to grow end \$104,867 received in cash.
- Stewardship is supposed to begin in March, an already busy month. Perhaps start Stewardship campaign in April? Jim is comfortable with this one-month delay.
- Board report out usually third Sunday of month, will be postponed by one week in March.
- Jim recommended: Perhaps hold concert as fundraiser for piano work that needs to be done?

# • Membership - Laurie

- \* (See addendum below)
- Reported out on increase in attendance, especially when Rev.
   Bob preaches. Peak: 123 people in attendance. We are seeing more UUs from other congregations. Music Sundays see increase in attendance. Twenty new folk have attended since summer.
- Two-session new membership meetings to be held this spring.
- Hope to reposition table in Fellowship Hall to connect with new folk.
- Need to think through different styles folks have and alter our approaches to attract them in a way that works for them.
- Under the Stairs events during coffee hour have not been wellattended lately.
- We should highlight 'First Thursday' meditations more strongly.
   This may appeal to new folks. We should publicize other USH activities that may appeal to people.

#### • Administration – Paul

- Bloomfield Avenue sign Enews will be soliciting congregational input on sign. Kevin will be installing it. Nina: perhaps add a QR code to sign? Youth use this often. Have a space for timely advertising of ongoing USH events?
- Plague is expected to arrive this week.
- Publicize fact that USH has substantive free parking.

- Piano juggling piano repairs June 8 into July piano will not be available as repairs happen. Will cost \$11,00 to repair. Need to consider how this will be paid for, without conflicting with Stewardship. Laura: motion made to try to pay for this out of endowment and raise funds later via a fall music activity, perhaps in September. Nina seconded this idea. Board vote: unanimous (original plan to do this was discussed in October).
- Five planters will be put in place in front, simultaneously dressing up building and increasing our safety. They weigh 300 – 400 pounds each, empty.

# • Spiritual Life- Rick

- Feb 2 USH soon will be holding a training for holding and lifting candles.
- WA plans all set for first half of year.
- Various music ministries are growing here at USH
- RE it is off and running. Shuan can use some more teachers.
- Rick not running for Spirit Life chair next year.
- Laurie concern about putting people in 30s- 50s as teachers, leaving lack of their presence during service when others in their 30s – 50's walk into service.

#### **GUEST COMMENTS**

 David Newton thanked Board for giving toward endowment. UBS spreads around allotment – steady safe distribution of funds.

#### **CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE**

Nancy – USH is blessed by having so many enthusiastic volunteers.
 Thanked Board members for our commitment to both the Board and the councils we serve on

**MOTION TO ADJOURN** – Nancy made **motion** to adjourn at 8:29 p.m;

# **Addendums – January 2024 Reports**

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis January 13th, 2025

"And now we welcome the new year. Full of things that have never been." – Rilke

Here's to 2025! May there be plenty of good surprises – and community to share the good ones, and get through the hard ones.

# **Sundays & Special Services**

- Solstice and Christmas Eve services went well, featuring a multi-faith altar and beautiful chants; and multiple readers and an appearance by Santa.
- Sermons on games and America starting the year out strong.
- Had a nice visit to RE December 29<sup>th</sup>, getting to know some of our youngest.
- Getting some more people interested in potentially being involved with words or music for First Thursdays perfect timing as I've pretty much used up my bag of tricks! Attendance continues strong and hoping to extend the invitation to newcomers more.

# **Programming and Social Justice**

- This is kind of a "meta-programming" item: I've been meeting with various lay leaders who are interested in starting, or have been starting, groups around spiritual practices like meditation, reiki, meditative rock painting, etc. I know Margaret B. also thought about having a "Wellness" day around spiritual practices but at the time there weren't enough enrollment. I am thinking about convening a "leaders' group" for anyone interested in starting one of these, that would meet monthly and support these groups and their leaders. I expect most of these groups will start slowly may just be 2-4 people for a while. But they are very visitor-friendly, and all have the potential to grow. Have spoken to Margaret and a few of these leaders about this idea.
- Shahan initiated a wonderful "mini-Con" overnight with nine youth from our congregation. There's a good group forming, with our youth slowly getting to know each other. Other congregations were interested in attending but could not furnish the advisors as requested: Shahan and I discussing possibly finding extra advisors from our congregation, though at this one it was just Shahan and me. Shahan set up Zoom calls with UU/Unitarian youth and leaders from Indonesia, the Philippines, Germany and Kenya.
- We're partnering with the Jewish Community Center to show,
   "Unspoken", a film about the Holocaust and LGBTQ identity in an

- Orthodox Jewish family. Been great getting to know David Jacobs there; our neighbors are doing wonderful work, as many of you know.
- Speaking of the JCC, we're taking part in their "Under One Roof" community art project this year thanks to a couple of our artists – stay tuned.
- Friday discussion group going strong. It was an honor and a delight to have my Christmas poetry group read by our book group!
- March 23<sup>rd</sup> coming up soon! Getting excited, it'll be great.

# **Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage**

- Beverly Spence memorial confirmed for Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> at 1 pm.
- Had a few outgoing MDF payments towards the end of the year (confirmed with Jon and Karolina) – always a time people are stretched a bit thin, and MDF such a help to those in dire straits.

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

- We had our staff holiday dinner at a hibachi restaurant (in January, as
  everyone too busy in December!) I'm so grateful we can offer this. It's
  extremely rare to get staff all together in one place and to be able to
  thank them for a year's work really helps moral. All going well there. I
  do need to get some 2025 performance plans up for staff, and set a
  few goals together.
- We managed without Karolina, and the roof only caved in once!
   Seriously, massive thanks to Kevin, and David, for making the repairs when a pipe had a massive leak.
- Rental policy and 501 c (3) paperwork ready to go; we just all need to meet to move forward.

Thanks all! Grateful for all you do – this congregation is really bringing it each week! I know people have been thriving in this community, and you all make it happen. Thank you!

Blessings, Rev. Bob

# 2. Treasurer's Report – Jon Covault - January 14, 2025

# Current budget year (2024-2025) income and expense update: Our operating budget balance sheet for the 6 month point in FY25 shows a

surplus of \$61,000. A large portion of which is from pledge payments being

\$57,000 ahead of schedule reflecting those who give 100% of their pledge in the first half of the church year. Rental income as budgeted (\$8,000 per 6 months), year-end appeal giving of nearly \$7,000 is short of our \$12,000 budget goal.

On the expense ledger side, several expenses have been less than budgeted including \$5,000 (12-month) from not hiring a custodian to replace Briana (thank you Karolina and Kevin for taking on the custodian duties), \$2,000 due to fewer hours needed to date for Diana our Sunday video wizard and also for our bookkeeper Patty, \$1,000 fewer paid pulpit guests than budgeted, \$5,000 related to natural gas budget greater spending in Jan-March than Oct-Dec,\$1,400 less than planned for choral singers to augment our choir.

We have yet to tap our budgeted one-time resources for balancing FY25 income and expenses which included \$10,000 from COVID19 pay check protection program grant and \$32,000 carry forward from FY24 related to grant payments received in FY25 for expenses in FY24. First and second quarterly summaries of USH accounts is provided as separate PDF. Total endowment funds held at UBS and Schwab were \$2,696,021 as of December 31. Capital expense \$1,780 was used to fabricate and install new railing for chancel steps. Railings were installed on December 23, 2024. The project was \$220 underbudget. The project was recommended to B&G by our EqUUal Access/Disability Committee to better meet ADA recommendations.

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# **3. Community Within Report ~ Laura Cipriano -** January 2025

- Activities and events this winter include the Regifting Sale, Artists Way, Neurographic Art, Gentle Yoga, Book Club, Pizza & Movie, Hiking Club, Lunch Bunch, Singalong Group, and Concerts by New World Tri on Thursday and the Shinolas on Friday this week.
- The webpage redesign is moving forward. Take a look at what the
  developers have so far. At this time only the developers have the
  ability to edit. Karolina, David, and I will be able to edit and add
  content after the new page becomes live at https://hartforduu.org/.
- Preview of new website: https://design.hostingct.com/hartford/ is the link for a preview of the new website.
- Possible Art & Crafts /food event, proposed by Olena Kirshon, after Easter service, as fundraiser for Ukrainian school of Art for children in Kyiv region. [Olena is her Ukrainaian name, which she prefers.] I like this idea, but I had a few questions. First, "After mass,

we will have Easter feast at lower level of your church on Sunday, April 20, 2025." Program for children will be in place, involving: Coloring books; bracelet-making; painting eggs; egg-hunting. I wondered, is this organization offering to provide these things? Will USH be expected to purchase them? I wrote to Yelena and she answered right away. This proposal is free for your congregation. All materials will be provided for children's activities by my team as well as the arts & crafts for sale. I thought, it will be a great idea to have some food after service on that Sunday. I am buying and preparing some food by myself. If your team can provide some food as well it will be great. FYI April 20 is a Soup Sunday date.

# 4. Membership Report ~ Laurie Kelliher – January 2025

- Attendance in the past two months has followed the cluster of the holidays with 116 before Thanksgiving and 123 before Christmas when the music of Sondheim was presented. Likewise numbers fell the Sunday after those holidays (60 and 75 in the pews). These swings likely represent family/friend visitors coming and the "day off" after they leave.
- Rev Bob sermons and Music Sundays are very well attended
- First Connections will be offered after service this Sunday 1/19/24. No one attended in October or November and a session was not held in December.
- An email goes out to the 20 visitors who have left an address since July. Capturing information on visitors remains elusive. For several months a visitors' table was set up at the entry to Fellowship Hall, but no one stopped by. Next week it will be tried again but set up in the middle of FH. Everyone is encouraged to introduce themselves to visitors at coffee hour and steer them to First Connections (this week) and the FH table in subsequent weeks. So far the most effective process has been circulating with a clipboard during coffee hour, but it also often interrupts a person in conversation with a congregant which is equally important for connection.
- The annual UUA Certification for individual congregations is due February 5, 2024. Questionnaires for "Membership and Attendance" and "Congressional Diversity will be submitted by Membership to Karolina Wojtysko who is compiling the multiple reports for USH.
- New Member Orientation will follow a similar format as last year with two sessions for people considering membership at USH. Meetings will be held in February/March. Dates TBA.

# 5. Building and Grounds Report ~ David Newton - DRAFT Building and Grounds Minutes:

Meeting of January 12, 2025

Servetus 9:30 AM

Members: (Present\*) Co-Chairs, Paul Cipriano\* & David Newton\*; Laura Cipriano\*, Toni Gold\*, Bill Simmons, Peter Meny, Ron Sexton\*, Jim Venneman\*, Fred Louis\*, Hugh Schweitzer, Lucille Giammatteo\*, Evan Williams\*, Paula Bleck\*, Aaron Bleck\*, Steve Gavron - Friends of B&G: Nancy Kemmerer\*, Janice Newton, Frederique and Michael Shea, Susan Hope, anyone else who cares to attend.

Staff: Kevin Girouard\* Rev. Bob\*, Guests:Co-Chair Newton introduced the meeting by taking note of all the improvements in Servetus creating an enhanced aesthetically excellent environment of which we of BG can be proud.

- 1. Resolved, the meeting Minutes of November 10, 2024, are approved. Resolution approved on a voice vote.
- 2. Whereas, it is desirable to have USH related cell phones for the Minister and Administrative Assistant for a variety of technical and practical reasons in the light of our current electronic environment, now, therefore be it Resolved, that Karolina is instructed to proceed with the necessary actions to secure two iPhone SE models for said use at a cost not to exceed \$875 for both phones and a monthly associated charge when added to our current plans of approximately \$75/month. And, be it further Resolved, that a new iPad be acquired for a cost not to exceed \$1,600 with an associated monthly connection cost not to exceed \$25 per month when added to our associated communications-electronic capabilities for use in connection with our audio/visual systems operation and use in accepting charge card transactions as well as a variety of other uses. The Resolution was moved seconded and discussed. Rev. Bob briefly discussed the issue with the current system that refers certain calls to his personal cell phone. The electronic communications between our Meeting House system and remote phones frequently results in dropped calls or failure to transmit voice both ways. The matter has been discussed with the experts on our house phone system, and they admit the app involved is not satisfactory. However, we do need the house system for other purposes. It is therefore, reasonable, for the expense involved, to procure a separate cell phone for business purposes for both Rev. Bob and Karolina. The iPad will be helpful for charge card acceptance, as well as forming a larger display for control the audio volumes of various mics. It will also be capable of periodic upgrades of its operating system. It may or may not be useful to have it with a separate line for use outside of our wifi capabilities. The Resolution was approved on a unanimous voice vote.

- 3. Report on progress on the Bloomfield Sign repair project. Evan distributed a picture of the proposed repair of our sign. She noted various features of the design that included but are not limited to: A rainbow chalice symbolic of welcome and inclusion for various groups. This aspect includes the phrase, A Welcoming Congregation, generally expressing the same message. It has been thought that the web address is the invitation to learn more including phone numbers, and access to other information. The cost quoted for more than the work required is reasonable. The design on the related photo proposal was discussed and generally favored by the meeting participants. It is proposed that the matter be recommended as to process by BG, the design be published for comment by the congregation, and that comments from all be considered should the proposed design need to be modified. A Resolution was moved and seconded to express the approval of BG for the procedures discussed. The sign committee are to seek any input the Board may care to express at the next Board Meeting, to cause to be published the design with information on content and solicitation of comments for further design consideration in the USH-Enews. After these are received the sign working group is asked to determine the nature of any further changes and move the matter along to contract, creation and inserts to the current sign. The current sign has been upgraded to LED lighting. The Resolution was approved on a unanimous voice vote.
- 4. Report on efforts to aesthetically upgrade Socinus, and...
  Evan reported that "rehabilitation" efforts on various rooms is nearing completion. Murray, Baloo and Davids Den are remaining for cleaning. esp. plexi doors and walls. Lucille Giammatteo has already begun plexi doors in Murray. Socinus wooden walls were cleaned or sanded by Greig Shearer and Joe Magdol. Susan Hope cleaned plexi doors Kevin painted metal trim and washed carpets. Evan did preparatory cleaning for painting and clerestory window cleaning. Furniture has been taken from other rooms in the building to furnish the room as a small meeting room. Evan is donating art for the panel walls. Thanks to all who have helped.
- 5. Report on plans to trim the Memorial Garden Birch tree while the ground is frozen. Evan will check with the vendor to assure action when the ground is frozen to minimize any damage from equipment.
- 6. Report on the recent repair of the north roof drain. Kevin explained the north drain failed dumping significant water in enough volume to fill a large tote requiring a sump pump for draining the water out of the container. Working with the minor assistance of David and Paul Kevin designed a bypass for the junction between the north roof drain and the plastic pipe lining the buttress drain. After four hours or so of design and construction of bypass piping and clamps, and related glop used for caulking, the drain

was temporarily back in service. Following that the contractor plumber and roofers were contacted, and they responded reasonably quickly and determined the Plumber job had failed. In the next available day work was performed to remove the existing drainage superstructure, catch basin, and attachment to exit piping as well as re-flashing the surrounding connection to the roof surface. When that was in place, Kevin identified a proper heating cord that is activated when the temperature is 38 or less degrees. It was installed in the exit pipe and will prevent freezing and blocking of the drain during freezing weather. Resolved, to thank Kevin for sedulous work on an emergency basis to prevent serious damage to the Sanctuary. Resolution passed with an enthusiastic unanimous voice vote.

- 7. Report on the acquisition of Bollards for the West Entrance, and such other security; plans as are in progress. Paul and Lucille Lu reports: Security Committee report:
- 4 Fire Blankets purchased.....
- 1-Chancel pulpit
- 1-Kitchen (next to stove top)
- 1-Library (next to stove top)
- 1-In USH Office

I was shown this morning 2 additional Fire Blankets purchased for USH by Mary Gail.

First Aid Kits....

- 1- At Welcome Table
- 1-In Kitchen downstairs
- 1-in Chancel pulpit

waiting to hear from Shahn Islam as to if one is needed for Child care area.

1-Extra in USH Office

Currently considering response to medical issues in the Meeting House. Paul reports: Five Bollard Planters are on order. Each weigh between 300-and 400-

pounds empty. They will be filled with ballast and the top will be available for planting of flowers, etc. There was a discussion mostly of various ideas for maintenance of the plants in the Bollard Planters. We will arrange the attachment to the sidewalk sufficient to qualify the planter sufficiently for grant reimbursement.

- 8. Other
- 9. Adjournment