

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting April 8, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum NO___YES_X

Board Attendees	Guests	Regrets
Nancy Kemmerer Rick Tsukada Jon Covault Nina Elgo Laurie Kelliher Judy Sullivan Gloria F. Mengual Rev. Bob Janis Jim Venneman Laura Cipriano Paul Cipriano	David Newton	

Orders of Business

6:30 p.m. Nancy-called the meeting to order.

Approval of March 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –Jim V. made motion to approve minutes. Rick T. seconded. Unanimous approval.

Slate of New Board Members – Laurie Kelliher

Nominees:

- President– Nina Elgo for a one-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2026
- President Elect - Virginia DeLima for a one-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2026
- Secretary – Gloria Francesca Mengual for a second two-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2026
- Chair, Council on Finance – Rocco Orlando for a one-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2027
- Chair, Spiritual Life – Michael Michaud for a two-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2027
- Chair, Social Justice Council – Judy Sullivan for a second two-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2027
- Chair, Council on Membership – Laurie Kelliher for a second two-year term 7.01.2025 to 6.30.2027

- Recommended that present Board members begin thinking about their replacements for the Board when they are stepping down and discuss this possibility with potential replacements.

Welcoming Congregation and Closed Captioning Discussion took place about closed captioning on two screens in Sanctuary for those with hearing challenges. Jon: On Zoom, person can select closed captioning option Judy: Suggested sending survey to congregation to see who may be interested in assistance. Rev. Bob – suggested having a third screen in front with words being spoken so people who need this can sit close to that. Paul: The Bushnell has an app people could download if they need assistance with hearing performance.

Stewardship Update

- Jim received 23 pledges to date, totaling \$53,205
- Goal is between \$345,000 - \$350,000. Last year was \$308,000 goal; we exceeded that by \$10,000.

UUWYN and other Youth Matters– Shahan Islam – UUWYN is UU Worldwide Youth Network. Shahan created a CT LLC of this. Connected with person in Nairobi; USH youth during summer connected with UU youth from 4 other countries. Shahan would like to expand this to UU youth connections worldwide. They have an adult advisory group that includes people from Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries, including Burma. Still in planning stages. Right now, we can offer 3 ways to connect:

1. Chat platform with other youth
2. Visits to other countries to connect with fellow UU youth
3. Service request submission form – for youth to submit ideas for service projects (7 ideas have been submitted from Transylvania)
 - Rick asked about age range – including up to college age youth? Shahan – yes, college age as well; he is not sure of age range cutoff.
 - Shahan is interested in connecting with any other UU youth groups internationally interested in this.
 - **Challenges Shahan is facing** – not enough volunteers working with youth. Rick: we are trying to assess last year's budget to estimate costs for next year. Rev. Bob: Shahan and Rev. Bob met with parents, who noted they would like to continue coming during the summer; that may be a challenge, given lack of volunteers.
 - **RE Committee** – Nina asked Shahan if having an RE committee be helpful? Shahan noted he was meeting with an RE committee early on, but they haven't met as of late. Shahan noted he hasn't felt a lack; he has run with it in terms of planning. Laura, who along with Diana, have met with Shahan, feels reconvening this group would be helpful. Nina – this group could help with parental recruitment, etc. Laura suggested getting UHART education majors to work with our youth. Nina – consistency is important for our youth; too many changes in teachers may be challenging to them. Shahan is using the *Soul Matters* curriculum. Laurie: during coffee hour, perhaps we can expose members to the curriculum at a table, familiarizing them with content. People need to feel their commitment is for a set (finite) time, giving them the opportunity to participate in services as well. Rev. Bob noted that connecting the curriculum with the focus of services could be helpful.

Candlelight Concerts Update, UUA Request for Funds and Renaming of Fellowship Hall– Nancy K.

- We have signed a three-month contract for first 3 concerts - \$1,100 per day, not counting fees for after event cleanup and storage of their materials at USH. Third concert will take place in Sept in the Sanctuary. Winter is busier time for them – two Friday and two Saturday concerts. Sanctuary cost is \$1,200. Dates: July 5, August 16 and September 26 – two concerts will take place each day. Expected attendance is 300; this is good exposure for USH.
- Annual letter was received from UUA – asking us to send them \$17,608 for the year; USH has been sending \$12,000 per year.
- There was proposal made about renaming Fellowship Hall Gervais Hall. The Gervais family did not want Fellowship Hall renamed after them. Board decided not to rename it.

Treasurer's Report – Jon Covault

- **UUA Pledge Request** (See report below.)
- Jon is recommending funding of between \$1,000 – \$2,000 for each council as well as designating \$800 for Chancel Arts group.
- In terms of AV equipment – We bought 2 new microphones – Jon proposed creating a separate line item for AV equipment – suggested \$3,000.00.
- Membership needs to have its own category and become a separate line item. Let's call it something like Congregational Events instead. – this is not with the Membership category that Laurie leads.
- Rental income has gone up from \$16,000 to \$30,000. Last year's gap of \$30,000 is down to between \$12,000 - \$14,000 for this year.

Council Reports

- **Community Within – Laura Cipriano**
 - Annual picnic in June – we have \$600 budget; June 8 is Mary Oliver service with Judy. Discussion of date for picnic resulted in keeping it on June 8.
- **Social Justice – Judy Sullivan (See report below).**
 - GHIAA is doing 'know your rights' workshop this week for immigrants.
 - GHIAA is hosting a presentation by Matt Ritter at Immanuel Congregational Church – asking state for more money to cover shortage of services for nonprofit providers
 - North Hartford Farming Initiative (NHFI) – racks set up to farm without soil. Mission: elimination of food insecurity. NHFI will present at May SJ meeting; they are being considered for a donation from USH
 - April 5 Hands Off rally at State Capital was attended by about 24 USH folk.
- **Spiritual Life– Rick Tsukada**

Rick expressed the need for more information related to budget, when it is due, what information is needed, etc.
- **GUEST COMMENTS**
 - None

- **CLOSING WORDS/MOTION TO ADJOURN** – Rev Bob: This is meaningful work. We each bring flickering candles of hope to our work.
 - **ADJOURN**: Nancy adjourned meeting at 8:40 p.m.
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Addendums – April 2025 Reports

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis

"Hope and love do not come from one great light alone, but from many small flames, shared freely." – Alan Taylor, "The Flame of Hope" story

Sundays & Special Services

- Historic Service, Bach, Membership Sunday with Hartford Gay Men's Chorus – we're certainly not missing a beat with Sunday services!
- Religious Education: Shahan led a great discussion with the parents of younger RE-age kids. Parents are excited about what's been happening. Would like to explore kids being in service a little more. Planning to come in summer and would love for there to be RE – but our volunteer resources are strained thin. Something to discuss..

Programming and Social Justice

- Gloria M. and I and the task force working on a report to send back to the congregation, based on their responses. Should have something to act on in May.
- Lots going on in the Social Justice sphere – won't list it all here but tremendous thanks to Judy Sullivan, and others for coordinating so much at once!
- Congregational "spiritual leaders" group already starting strong – there's the rug hooking class now going on every Friday, and a new proposal for a spiritual practices group.
- Visited Levo International – a non-profit hydroponic farm and market right around the corner from us at 441 Homestead – and really impressed with their approach to feeding people. The Mids group may meet there next month, and let Social Justice know,
- CCIU (Connecticut Council For Understanding) meeting scheduled for June 1st. We need to start joint publicity with Fern Street, Manchester.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

Beverly Spence memorial in April. May be child dedications upcoming too.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- I'll be away with family in Puerto Rico April 12 – 17. My phone should work...but who knows these days. Thank you all! The flame of hope is going strong...

2. Membership Report – April 8, 2025– Laurie Kelliher –

Seventeen new members joined USH in a ceremony held during the service on April 6, 2025. Several more people plan to become members but were unable to attend the Sunday service. By the end of the church year USH should have 20 or more people who have joined our community. Also welcomed back to USH are at least 5 members who have returned after many years absence.

Attendance at Sunday services for the past 4 weeks has continued to be robust. We have had 99+ people in the pews and with the Zoom audience, attendance has often exceeded 100. March 26, USH celebrated the Meeting House being named to the National Register of Historic Buildings and the sanctuary was filled.

Newcomers continue to arrive. First Connections was held March 30th but only 2 people attended both of whom have been involved in USH for over a year. This church year few newcomers have attended First Connections despite email invitations and announcements from the pulpit. Most likely the lively chatter in Fellowship Hall is drawing folks and has the same positive effect that FC has had in the past.

Newcomers receive an email of welcome the week following their visit. But obtaining that email address remains the limiting factor. Setting up a visitors table in the more central area of Fellowship Hall (FH) with better signage had little response. The most effective introduction continues to be wandering FH, saying hello and offering a clipboard to obtain info.

Vote tallies for Volunteers of the Year will be complete as soon as BOD completes voting.

Finally, with thanks to everyone who participated in the search, USH has three excellent nominees for the upcoming open Board positions.

- President-Elect - Virginia deLima
- Spiritual Life - Michael Michaud
- Finance - Rocco Orlando

Going forward, I suggest that we each spend the final year of our BOD term considering those who would best fill our role. Within our fields we each meet people who would be a good fit or have shown interest in the work we do.

Finally, as we discussed at the last BOD meeting, our USH nominees for the BOD are more appointed than voted upon as we have not had more than one nominee per position. The process has been successful with excellent people, but it is one more idea to consider how we may want to expand the nominees list.

3. Treasurer Report ~ Jon Covault

Current budget year (2024-2025) income and expense update:

Our FY25 operating budget balance sheet for the 9 months July 2024-March 2025 indicates current income is on target at 75% of FY25 budget (including \$251,000 from stewardship, \$13,000 rental income and \$42,000 from endowment contribution). Expenditures paid to date total \$334,320 which is 4% under budget for the 9-month period.

We have not yet needed to tap our budgeted one-time resources for balancing FY25 budget which included \$10,000 from COVID19 pay check protection program grant and \$32,000 carry forward from FY24 related to security and historic designation grant payments received in FY25 for expenses in FY24. I anticipate needing to use around \$5,000 - \$10,000 of these resources for FY25, the unused remain available if need for the FY26 and FY27 budgets.

FY26 draft budget (July 25 – June 26)

An initial draft for the FY26 budget is beginning starting from income and expense data from FY24 and current FY25. Contributions from the endowment will be budgeted as per the endowment committee's recommendation in February of \$60,830 for FY26 (4.5% of the average unrestricted endowment funds past 3 years, a 6.5% increase from FY25). The draft budget includes a pledge goal of \$345,000 for the annual stewardship campaign and a doubling of rental income to \$30,000. To balance the draft budget, the income account includes onetime use of our remaining \$10,000 COVID paycheck protection program funds (line 459000) and \$4,000 from prior years' budget surplus (line 414000).

Budgeted expenses include 3% annual wage increase, 15% increase for insurance and modest increases in music budget, spirit life and line item to support AV equipment needs. The total FY26 draft expense budget is 3.5% higher than FY25 approved budget.

4. Social Justice Council ~ Judy Sullivan **Immigration Organizing**

- St Patrick/St Anthony Immigration Ministry:
 - Several USH members are active on the planning committees for the Prison Ministry and the Family Support Ministry
- CT Faith-Based Immigrant Solidarity Network (FISN):
 - TRUST Act Now campaign planning an interfaith event at the Capitol
 - The next online statewide FISN gathering late April or early May
- Welcoming Project:
 - Four USH members volunteered as drivers for the newest Syrian family
- GHIAA:
 - Know Your Rights workshop on ICE preparedness via Zoom, Thursday, April 10, from 12 – 1:30pm – open to the congregation.

Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA)

Tonight hundreds of GHIAA leaders and others are gathering at Immanuel Congregational Church for a conversation with Speaker Matt Ritter. The purpose of the event is to compel our legislature to modify CT's Fiscal Roadblocks and demand a moral budget.

New Neighbor Partner Opportunities

- CT for ALL: a statewide coalition of labor, community, and faith organizations representing hundreds of thousands of people – black, brown and white. Working to repair CT's broken tax structure through legislation that would provide immediate relief to struggling working families and require the wealthiest among us to contribute more to the common good of all.
Constanza Segovia will get back to us after the end of the legislative session.
- **Levo International**: Mission: Empowering People to End Poverty
North Hartford Farming Initiative- Hydroponics – farming without soil
Elimination of food insecurity, production of fresh produce, Increased employment, Community education and Conversion of blighted, vacant lots.

Christian Heiden, Founder and Managing Director - invited to Social Justice May meeting

April 5 Hands Off Rally at the Capitol

See photo in tomorrow's enews – latest count #24 USHers were proudly wet and appropriately loud!

5. Building & Grounds/Endowment ~ *David Newton*

- The clean-up work for various spaces is continuing under the able leadership of Evan Williams.
- Part of the Lundy vision is a large expanse of glass constituting the outer walls of our Meeting House. One consequence is, as the years pass, that glass is broken one way or another. Currently it must be replaced by shatterproof glass, which is not surprising but does involve additional expense. Recently we found a crack in a very large sheet of glass in the Chapel. The experts said it was something that happens after several years rather like a crack in a car windshield that begins small and progresses. The cost of replacement is about \$1,909. We also have damage in various less obvious panes of glass. We will also replace what appears to be a bullet hole in an Emerson window, which has been there for some time.
- If the weather cooperates for a few days, we will have the required painting done on our blacktop marking traffic flow and handicapped accessible parking spaces.
- Several large senescent cotton wood trees have fallen on our parking lot areas. Kevin has chain sawed the residue that is then carried off by visiting wood burning gardeners.
- Process, there has been a good deal of interest in bestowing a name on the Ambulatory as well as Classroom D. I think process is very important to our success as a group. To this end BG will shortly consider creation of one or more ad hoc groups to publicize naming opportunities in the USH-Enews, to solicit comment and suggestions from congregation members, and to thereafter recommend various actions to the Board. The result may be somewhat obvious, but the process is important so that as a congregation we feel we all participated, could have participated, were solicited for opinions, or could have voiced opinions, and therefore collectively we own decisions.
- **Visioning attitudes.** Please remember when we have visitors and show them our National Register Listed building, the visitors will see what you point out and be impressed accordingly. In fact, they will always in the future see the beauty and symbolism of the building as described. It is, as we know well, an imperfect building though symbolic of our history and faith. Bottom line, keep any griping about leaks, defects of various sorts etc., etc. for behind-the-scenes non-public discussions where we can deal with them.
- In another matter, please be advised that the Endowment Committee is moving forward with plans for an Endowment Campaign next summer and fall. This matter will call for some priority and flexibility in speakers, services, and related

matters. I will be sending you copies of Committee Minutes to get you informed "in the picture" going forward.

6. Administrative Council Report ~ *Paul Cipriano*

A member of USH has expressed interest in donating the funds to purchase and lease emergency response equipment for the meeting house.

The offer includes but may not be limited to an Automated External Defibrillator, first aid kits, and a stop the bleed kit. There is also the possibility of grant funding for the equipment.

The AED we are considering has self-testing capabilities to verify it is functioning properly. It also has a video screen and accompanying audio which walks the user through the steps necessary to use the defibrillator safely and effectively. Even the most inexperienced person could use it. It is the AED that the city of Hartford uses along with the Bushnell Theater and UUSE.

AED's can be purchased or leased, and they can also have a service contract to test and maintain them but that requires a monthly fee besides the cost of the equipment.

Connecticut, like most states, has Good Samaritan Laws with the overriding purpose of encouraging professionals and laypersons to help those in need of emergency medical assistance or first aid, (including AED's) even when the actor is under no legal obligation to do so.

A committee of volunteers, including Martha Bradley, Evan Williams, Susan Hope and Laura Cipriano, are working on what types of plants would work best in the new planters.

7. Community Within Report ~ *Laura Cipriano*

The Community Within focuses on what connects us to others in the USH Community with opportunities to work and play together, explore mutual interests including continued spiritual growth, religious learning, art, books, and community fellowship. Connect with others and become part of our lively and diverse community. Find your niche by exploring our community-based activities and volunteer opportunities. We are fully back in-person, often with an online option, to connect and socialize within our society.

Big Events this year include:

- Ingathering, and the Regifting Sale, facilitated by Susan Hope and Gloria Bent
- The National Register Celebration, Nancy Kemmerer, Judy Robbins, Lu Giammatteo
- Seder Event in April
- Annual Picnic in June

Connections:

Weekly and monthly programs and groups all contribute to the life of our congregation.

- The Lunch Bunch has lively discussions over lunch, Movie and Pizza gatherings, Yoga, Connection Circles, the Men's Group, Saturday Singalongs, the Magdalene Circle, the Artist's Way group and the Book Club remain highly active. New groups include the Mids (20s, 30s, 40s), Genealogy, and the Hiking Club.
- Rick Tsukada has taken the lead setting up on occasions when extra hands are needed (chapel services, memorial services, picnics, concerts, potlucks, etc.) and watching the door to welcome participants and know who is in the building.
- The Meeting House Presents concert series is in its 8 th year. Attendance is significantly up this year. The 2025-26 season is already booked with returning favorites and exciting new bands.
- The Caring Network continues its work of identifying, reaching out, and supporting members in need... whether of a ride or a friendly phone call or just a warm smile.

Communications:

- The USH webpage has a new URL <https://hartforduu.org/> and a new updated look.
- Karolina Wojtysko and Tina Davies collaborate to produce an attractive and informative weekly newsletter and events reminder every week.
- Judy Robbins added a new lively voice for this congregation when she created the USHer, which has published four editions in Sept. 2024-March 2025.