

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting June 10, 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 Jim Venneman Rev. Bob Laura Cipriano	David Newton Janice Newton Virginia DeLima	Paul Cipriano Nina Elgo

Orders of Business

6:40 p.m. Nancy-called the meeting to order. Welcome, Laura read the covenant. matters of the heart and chalice lighting

Approval of May 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –Gloria requested a vote of the May 2025 Board minutes. Jim made motion to approve minutes. Laura seconded. Unanimous approval. One Correction: Correct spelling: Deana, not deanna.

Update on Music director Search ~ Nina

Nina noted that to date, we have some good candidates. USH received resumes of 3 candidates - graduates from Julliard. Application deadline was extended to July 1. Jon – extending to July 15 may make more sense.

Update ~ Rev. Bob

- Reflections on what’s happening in this country and where we want to be in this story.

Treasurer’s Report – Jon Covault - *(See Treasurer’s report in Addendum below)

- Jon provided update on how things look for the end of our fiscal year. Close to \$500,000.
- We used \$26,000 from the \$80,000 reserve.
- Our expense total is more than last year, including 3% cost of living raise for staff and increased insurance expenses.
- New items – chancel arts budget of \$800 is an increase

- Section leads = money not spent on them this year; money has been budgeted for 16 services and rehearsals
- There is a total of \$17,000 in increased expenses.
- Laura suggested that USH take months when we have five Sundays and use those collections toward our music program. Nancy raised concern that other divisions within USH may ask for more funds, not just music. Slippery slope when asking for funds for one area solely and not others. Nancy went on to suggest that the monthly amount collected for GNOs appear in the ENews.
- Rev Bob – agrees with Nancy; there probably are other ways to raise funds for music efforts.
- Judy – questions why SJ budget has been reduced by \$200. Jon noted that we can probably add that extra \$200.
- Motion to accept 2025/26 budget: Jim moved; Laurie Kelliher seconded; motion passed unanimously.

Finance: ~ *Jim Venneman*

- There were three more pledges that came in during the past few days. One increased her pledge by 23%. Right now we are at \$316,900. He expects USH will get to \$320,000 or \$325,000. On the income side, USH had a good stewardship campaign, which raised \$15,000 more than last year, but 2.5% less than the estimated expectation. Jim's role on the Board continues until end of June, plus 3 months after that. He has connected with Rocco Orlando, who is replacing him.

Council Reports

- **Community Within – *Laura Cipriano***
 - Picnic was great success. We hosted 13 kids from the Village, along with their chaperones.
 - All food was donated.
 - On behalf of her husband, Paul, Administration report:
 - Planters out front are filled with flowers
 - Piano keyboard is gone for now. More cameras coming are soon; we expect to be reimbursed for this soon.
- **Social Justice – *Judy Sullivan***
 - Judy showed a two-minute video about LEVO– Kristin started group in north end of Hartford four years ago. Its goal: empowering people to fight poverty. Discussed use of urban hydroponic farming to grow vegetables for the area. They are located on Homestead Ave in Harford.
 - Judy proposing after meeting with Christian, to set up on USH grounds a rack with PVC pipes that recirculate water into veggies on our grounds. He noted we could add solar panels to this. It also gives USH folk opportunity to garden here, then donate it to Horace Bushnell Food Pantry, along with Foodshare.
 - Group is also looking for volunteers to help out.
- **Membership – *Laurie Kelliher***
 - Karolina is looking forward to getting rid of Church Windows software program.
 - Laurie would like to cull the church list of folks who haven't been active. It most likely will take a year to complete this culling transition. If people

- could review list and note to Laurie any people who are or are not involved in our congregation, that would be helpful.
 - Some people are active in church activities, i.e. Artists Way, but don't attend regular Sunday services. We want to keep them on our list.
 - Three more people have signed the membership book after the recent membership ceremony.
 - Having table in front for people to sign in prior to service hasn't worked well. People are rushing in, with service starting very soon. She asked that we keep your eyes out for newcomers.
 - **Candlelight concerts – Nancy** – She and Karolina are meeting with this group soon; they are asking USH to send them invoices.
 - **Spiritual Life ~ Rick Tsukada**
 - Rick sent out reflections on what he's done during the past two years, having worked with Rev. Bob and Shahan. It is very different when there is a minister present, vs. when there wasn't one during previous transition time. Board needs to reflect on how decision-making works in the future. It was hard for Rick to work with staff to obtain documentation of what they are doing. Given the size and complexity of all that is happening, it is difficult to manage as designed. We need to reflect on this.
 - Jon – need to make time for person from each committee to take turns presenting during Board meetings
 - Rev. Bob – doing this regularly, with each division taking turns, would make sense.
 - **GUEST COMMENTS** –David Newton noted that he sent along a piece regarding the endowment; he requested that this be added to the minutes.
 - **CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE** – Rev. Bob noted that we don't know what we know will be effective to stop all this present administration's actions. Saturday will be a big day. It is important to keep our spirits up, recognize that these are extraordinary times and acknowledge its impact on us. Let's be together during these times. Sometimes it's simple and direct, like showing up. Sometimes it's helping grow plants for the hungry. A word to each Board member: Rev Bob went on to share his reflections with each individual board member as our last meeting as a group came to a close.
 - **MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Nancy adjourned meeting at 8:30 p.m.
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Addendums – June 2025 Reports

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead

Thank you for all you do, dear Board. We've had a great, challenging, inspirational, fun year together. Thank you for your stewardship of this congregation and your courage. Now have a great summer!

Sundays & Special Services, Religious Education

- Michael Michaud's first year of WA leadership going strong – summer is pretty much covered, including music, and some great services coming up.
- Late spring/early summer always an interesting mix, and this year no exception, with Leonard Epps and the Lion King, a sterling Youth Sunday, Memorial Day about possibilities, and my talk on the refugees of Samos featuring slideshow expertly teed up by Karolina and Diana.
- I've had a lot of conversations about RE with lay leaders and Shahan. Looking into curriculum for next year as well as revamping teacher recruitment. Lots of ideas.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

Ongoing, two weddings are coming up, which is fun. I'm keeping a little extra capacity in the summer, knowing that the odd funeral does come up, and wanting to make sure I can hopefully take on any modest extra load without burning out in summer. Really good to have a list of colleagues who can take on "outside" funerals, grateful to area colleagues who provided me with names of possible ceremony leaders.

Programming and Social Justice

- The new group of "emerging spiritual leaders" – new and long-time lay leaders who are contemplating new initiatives at the congregation – have a couple of interesting ideas for next year, including resuming a mediation offering. Watch this space.
- CCIU Interfaith gathering was a massive success. THANK YOU to everyone who made it happen here!
- Immigration initiatives are starting to take shape, thanks to Sherry Manetta and Judy Sullivan for putting considerable work into the possibilities.
- Meeting with Levo International for partnership possibilities around their hydroponic non-profit on Homestead Avenue – including CSA shares, order yours now!

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- Looking forward to General Assembly; have a good crew attending from USH, including younger adults.
- Planning ahead for the summer. Will be taking 2-3 weeks vacation in August, and a study leave week here or there. Am available for emergencies, regardless. Covering for Rev. Tony's sabbatical in Meriden, though that's likely not to be too onerous a commitment.
- With Nina our incoming President, incoming Board Members, Karolina and Shahan, planning ahead for next year.

Thank you all, happy summer!

2. Treasurer Report ~ *Jon Covault*

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

I continue to project a surplus for FY25 of approximately \$12-15,000 as a result of our program leaders, minister, DRE and USH staff being respectful of needs to use our resources wisely.

- **FY26 draft budget (July 25 – June 26).**
The proposed FY26 budget (\$499,000) includes contributions from the endowment 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 budget includes an updated pledge goal of \$325,000 for the annual stewardship campaign (original goal of \$345,000) and a doubling of rental income to \$32,000. To balance the draft budget, the income account includes one-time use of our remaining \$10,000 COVID paycheck protection program funds (line 459000) and \$26,000 from prior years' budget surplus (line 414000).
- **Increase in budgeted expenses compared with 24-25 approved budget** total \$27,000
 New expense items include funds (\$1,000) for food at major council events / meetings; chancel arts budget (\$800); AV equipment (\$2,500) and additional funds for a piano accompanist for choir practice and performances (\$4,000) and section leads for 16 services and rehearsals (\$7,500); line item for minister expenses (\$1,200; eg travel to local meetings, hosting meeting related to ministry) [total \$17,000]
- **Increased ongoing expenses**
 - Liability/fire insurance increased \$4,500
 - Increased number of guest musicians \$750
 - Annual COLA 3% increase \$16,000 (including pension contributions and FICA) These are partially offset by minor \$100-\$1,000 reductions in a few expense items and not replacing our part-time custodian provided savings of approximately \$9,500.
 - The proposed budget assumes new music director starting end of September, each month earlier would add \$2,300.

***** UNABLE TO INCLUDE FY OPERATING BUDGET SUBMITTED BY JON HERE – NEED TECH HELP TO INCLUDE THAT IN THIS REPORT**

3. Social Justice Council Report ~ Judy Sullivan

- Middletown Pride Parade – Saturday, June 7
 5 USH members marched with 4 Universalist Church of WH members.
- West Hartford Pride Festival – Saturday, June 21. We plan to share a table again with UCWH
- Immigration Organizing
 One of the goals is to expand the reach of this ministry beyond the social justice council.
 Six members, not on SJ council have signed up to participate in one of the three groups working with immigration. These groups are still in the planning stages, so as definite projects become available, I expect an increase in interest.
- GHIAA (Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance)
 Two more USH members are participating in the spring Core Leaders Training program.
- Levo International: Christian Heiden, Founder and Managing Director

- 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. We are looking at multiple ways to partner: they are offering CSA shares of fresh vegetables, and there are multiple volunteer opportunities. <https://levointernational.org/>

4. Spiritual Life Council Report ~ Rick Tsukada

This report is subjective and reflects my two years in a time in this church's life of rebuilding our congregational life. It lacks any input from any of the departments that comprise the Spirit Life Council, namely the Worship Associates, the Religious Education Department, the Chancel Arts and finally the Music Ministry Program.

This absence of such separate reports points to an issue that, to the mind of this council chair, may require both discussion and perhaps even a creative rewrite of the role of the position itself and by implication the idea of a spirit life council itself. That issue, on the most simple level, is: what is the function of the chair to the elements of the council and most importantly, the role of the chair to the board?

This report centers on my thoughts regarding that wondering.

Why does the lack of department report point to that issue. In blunt language, there is no reason for them to make a report through the council chair. These "departments" are primarily integrated through the function of the minister and the production of Sunday Services, or in the case of Religious Education, Sunday School. For all practical matters they operate fully independent from the Board and it is only when a "church wide" issue comes up that the board becomes involved. Which at this point makes the council chair and to a secondary degree the board a reactive relationship. Any needs that these departments have that require a board response is mostly addressed through the minister who also manages any of the staffing issues as well as the program issue that may arise.

I offer the idea the departments under the spirit council should be represented at board meetings through the voice and perspective of the minister. I further offer that if the minister deems that if a particular issue arises a need for board attention that the "head of that department" presents it directly to the board.

What is the role of the Spirit Life Council Chair and by default a Spirit Life Council?

I believe that a different structure should be considered for the "make up" to the spirit life council. I believe a "Spirit life Committee" be formed, consisting of the Minister, Chair of the Worship Associates, the Music Director, and the designated head of the Chancel Arts. The committee will meet as a practical support group for the minister who has a wider range of spiritual tasks that would involve the three areas of worship production. For example, Memorial Services, First Thursday Services, Hosting Events, Weddings etc. This small group might also serve as a "think tank" for meeting spirit life needs of the church.

This Spirit Life Committee will have the responsibility of paying attention to the delivery of spirit life programming at USH and the health of the spiritual life of the church. Not necessarily producing products that address a need, but perhaps promoting and

getting other departments to develop that identifies a direct need, such as a community event like a pot luck.

There is also a "just in case need" to have such a body to take on many of the tasks (organizing, planning, leadership, etc) of the minister during those times USH may be without a minister. Such a knowledgeable group will be key to managing the upkeep of a healthy congregation during those times. The actual administrative task of running the church is not the task of this group, but it may play a part in planning church activities during such times.

This committee has the flexibility and capacity to react faster than the larger WA group and may at times meet directly with the WA's when planning and coordination would benefit from the combined effort. The minister is the through line for both groups...

What of the Religious Education Department

The leadership of the Religious Education Department is under the direct management and vision of a professional staff employee. The position is answerable to the board, but is directly under the directives of the minister. But that is easier to say than to sort out practically.

I am not sure that many ministers have the "band width" either in the experience (training), interest, or time to truly "supervise" a church's RE program. However it is also true that a church would look to the minister to be "ultimately" responsible for do so...so how does it work in reality? (Note: currently the Spirit Life Chair influence on RE is minimal and the role in general is based on the personalities of both positions)

The Religious Education Program presents a totally different set of needs. I have come to see the Religious Education Program as a division of the USH organizational chart...almost a related but separate business. RE has a totally separate set of administrative, staffing, resource and population (product user) than the rest of the church. The "adult" church and the "youth" church are symbiotic but they have their own ecosystem, and therefore their own independent operations.

The RE program is currently in need of attention to bring it into a self reliant, self determining, and self defining program. The recent growth of the numbers of kids may require the need of having additional paid staff. It definitely needs a dedicated RE Support Committee to interface with the adult population of the church as well as to help maintain a dependable labor force. I am not confident the current adult church population has the capacity to run such a RE program relying on volunteers only. It is important to note that there are standards of compliance for gathering of children such as at least two adults being present at all times. This includes being in a car, classroom, etc.

From the point of the cost of running a "contemporary" RE program I have observed our current program (Shahan) has made a mighty effort to bring it into the current culture of youth. Such things as adding electronics and activities that mirror recreation (lake compose, retreats, field trips). Although I do not have an attendance numbers for these activities I think they are shaping our program as a place of "adventure" and inquiring in to world. My wonderings is can the program be afforded by the church...and these activities suggest perhaps a need for a "activities fund" so that all can participate no matter what income level the families have...I don't know the answer to this.

What of the Spirit Life Council Chair?

I see the role of the Spirit Life Chair as a person who has as the function to watch and think about the entire church's spiritual life health...a kind of general USH Spiritual Surgeon General, a person in charged with Public Health. A "consultant" whose job is to keep tabs on the pulse of the church. The "chair" has the particular point of view of watching for whether or not the church is "developing a cold", feeling the nature of the "morale" of the congregation, is it happy, scared, sad...could it use something here or there to make life better...

Strangely enough there is an example of this role, albeit unofficial but comparable "position" already operating in the church and on the board...David Newton, has been the eyes and ears (and foreman) of the buildings needs.

I think that this task could belong to the already up and running Ministerial Shared Ministry Advisor group. I think that group might also expand its responsibility as our Spiritual Surgeon Generals to make recommendations for discussion or action to the board for consideration as improvements to the health of the church.(as David Newton does around B&G)

Summary/Conclusion

i am not sure that in it is current form that there is a need to have a Spirit life Council not a chair position.

Reports on the departments:

I have not received any individual reports from any of the "departments" under the structure of the Spirit Life Council. Therefore they are the product of myself and my observations only. However, except for the Music Ministry department (I did not request a report,) the other department were ask for a report. I particularly was interested in a report on real expenditures whether donated or budgeted. I was hoping to get the departments prediction on next years needs as a projection of emerging vision of program development based on real cost. I did this being fully aware that we have limited resources in both funds and volunteers.

Chancel Arts

I believe that Chancel Arts now have a separate line item in the budget. However my observation is that much of their materials are donation by the artists themselves. I have notice that they make really good use of their "prop" inventory. However as the rentals become more frequent and varied there may be a need to enlarge their inventory of props.e.g. Simple solid colored backdrops. Furthermore, the actual setting up of the Chancel is becoming more complicated as the demand for different "looks" may be require with increase use. It is a volunteer activity but does the responsibility extend to events other than Sunday Services?

Worship Associates

Since I am a worship associate and have been for a while, I have a point of view that is informed by that experience. Over the number of years, starting with the end of the Kathy and Heather Ministry, the worship associates have been expanding their role and importance to the church. They have taken much of the responsibility of the nature and the production of Sunday Services and because of this have set a "style" and "quality"

that has helped define out churches spiritual practice. The shared ministry is a active and structural success which arose out of an understanding that USH needed to have a less Ministerial Centric Leadership due to the changing exceptions of Unitarian Universalist Ministers longevity.

To that end they have become very good at developing in house pulpit talent, increased capacity for the responsibility for music, and they have expanded the range of what is worship means in a community based church. It should be noted that a shared ministry, has positively been inoculated into other areas of church life and is reflected in cross pollination (collaborations) and subjects matters. A way of looking at the role of the WA's is that they have become a kind of UU Deacons, and it should be noted that this is not common to my understanding in UUism. Their budget has also increased to accommodate the hiring of pulpit guest and musicians.

Music Director

USH is currently looking for a new director of music. It should be noted that this position has also undergone changes as this church has adjusted to a "new minister" (Rev. Robert Janis) and has attracted new faces. It is important to note that the former Director of Music has enlarged the musical range of what the congregation is expecting from its worship experience, in particular, a capacity for the music of "popular" musician as well as creative interpretations of familiar songs, new compositions, and sounds from a variety of instruments. Our experience of our music has become an "adventure" in of itself.

In addition a element of musical instrumental maintenance awareness has been become a more active expense especially as we increase of use of guest musicians. The major example of that is the "repair" the 50 year old Sanctuary piano which has become appreciated as a special sounding instrument., as well as the increased "appearance" of our organ, which to my belief was spirited into reality by Phylis Hall sponsoring an Organ Concert a couple of years ago and more recently by Michael Michaud bringing organist to play at special occasions.

Religious Education

The RE department is the early stage of recovery from several very powerful influences,, the loss of a long time RE director that became incompatible with the church, "Covid" where we lost a generation of children", a long period of instability with filling staff and students, and now the installment of a new RE director.

So just by observation:

We have a growing student population that is still a little unstable from week to week but is showing signs of predictability.

The new director (Shahan Islam) is both energetic, creative, and has made great efforts to bring the modern age into the class room. And he has an expanded view of what the liberal Religious Education experience should be to include other congregations and experience beyond the physical plant of our classroom, outing, retreats, field trip, etc.

(Note: In the description of the Spirit Life Council there is another program that was created during the Kathy and Heather period called **Spirit Life** which began with the running of a UU based program. That program is no longer being offered in part because its place is now being filled by current programing. A remnant of that program continues

in a program called Spirit Chat. There is no need to maintain that program under the umbrella of Spirit Life Council.)

5. Endowment ~ *David Newton, Chair, Endowment Committee*

To Ashley Martella, UBS 05/30/25

You pointed out we may be at a sort of high point in the investment background for FY 25-26. This is so because of the volatility to date and uncertainty afflicting the business cycle. This situation also would suggest reducing investments to raise cash expected to be needed later in the fiscal year.

For UBS planning purposes:

\$60,830 We expect the draw from the **General Fund 07854** (certain to be withdrawn in monthly installments during fiscal year beginning 7/1/25)

From the **Capital Account 16908** our needs are somewhat unpredictable. For our purposes we see:

\$44,570 from a long-delayed chancel lighting project perhaps maturing in late summer or fall.

\$10,400 due this summer for piano maintenance repair (certain)

\$10,000 set aside for small capital projects during the fiscal year. (certain)

\$ 6,888 Clerestory Window repair planning (probably this Fall)

\$10,000 Actual Clerestory Window repair, custom work (unknown)

Total Operating fund: \$60,830

Total Capital Projects \$81,858

Having provided this information, we have noted cash investments may be attractive during a pending recession providing a welcome yield.

We also appreciate UBS diversification to other countries that continue to do better than the US.

We are pleased to have your continuing expertise applied to the amount of cash held for the purposes outlined above. Our plan will be to request the cash on a per project basis as project needs are confirmed with associated dates for payments.

For our part, we will continue to give you the best notice we can for pending withdraws realizing it is in our collective best interests.

Thank you for the recent briefing and for your continued investment expertise utilized on our behalf.

David Newton, Chair, Endowment Committee