

BOD Meeting 12/22/25

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting

December 22, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum NO ____ YES __X__

Board Attendees	Guests	Regrets
Nina Elgo Laura Cipriano Paul Cipriano Jon Covault Laurie Kelliher Michael Michaud Rocco Orlando Judy Sullivan Rev. Bob	David Newton Janice Newton	Gloria Mengual Virginia DeLima

Orders of Business

6:30 p.m. Nina called the meeting to order.

Chalice lighting and opening words with Nina Elgo.

Approval November 2025 BOD Minutes –

All in favor. Minutes accepted.

Minister's Report

The congregation is saddened by the news of Ted Johnson's death. Rev Janis will participate in Ted's memorial service later in January. Laura Cipriano and Mike Covault will oversee condolences from USH to Nancy and family members.

Rev Bob gave appreciation to Board member Rocco Orlando for his diligence in obtaining optimal insurance for USH employees. BOD agreed that Rocco was a most excellent resource in the diligent search to benefit staff.

Rev Bob noted that Karolina Wojtysko, Church Operations Manager will be on vacation until January 5, 2026. Rev Bob will begin his own vacation January 10 through January later.

Item: In addition to the Treasurer's report Jon Covault reminds the BOD of Jim Venneman's suggestion that a year-end appeal be considered. Similar appeals have been successful in the past and payments have typically been only a few percentage points below expectations.

Specific items were reviewed including the security grants.

Michael Michaud noted that the Board had previously set a budget for section leads based on a need for 3 section leads (it had been anticipated that Sarah McKenzie would be the 4th section lead – this didn't materialize). The need for a fourth section lead will cost \$1,200 more than originally budgeted for the remaining half of the year (\$2,400 annually, or from \$7,200 to \$9,600). Jon made a motion to increase this year's budget by \$1,200 to cover the second half of the year with four section leads. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The hope is to have 8 choral services between February and June (roughly every 3 weeks).

It was noted that the Schola singers greatly enhance the music at services, but are costly. We are fortunate to have some of the finest church musicians available in the area. Balancing that fact is the expectation that the music program is driving higher attendance.

Paul Bisaccia has offered a benefit performance for USH. Possibly tickets could be priced \$20-40. The generosity of his offer was noted. Michael, Meredith and Karolina will look at the possibility of a Sunday in April or May. Meredith would like the Choir to perform at this fundraiser. It will be a rededication of the piano following its major restoration.

Proceeds from the fundraiser could be used for the music program including guest musicians and piano maintenance. It was noted that the chapel piano has several cracked keys and as they are ivory. It is not clear that they can be replaced to that standard.

Item: New Human Resources Committee is being developed with Rev Bob, Carl Sheilds, Linda Duncan, Paul Cipriano and Laura Cipriano to update policies. Rocco Orlando has offered his services to health care and insurance issues.

Item: The new AED has arrived. Kevin Girouard is creating a location space for it. Rocco advises that training will be developed. He notes that CPR certification is a much more involved and costly training.

Item: Special funding

Suggestion made that in months which have a 5th Sunday (2026: March 29, May 31, August 30, Nov 29) the plate might be given to a discretionary fund while all others would be the usual 50/50 with the month's GNO. Rev Bob notes that the Christmas Eve offering will go to the Minister's Discretionary Fund (MDF).

Item: Health Insurance Rocco Orlando

An urgent Zoom meeting was held on Friday December 12 in response to the need for immediate action on an employee health plan decision necessitated by a short window for enrollment. The UUA insurance available to church employees is no longer cost-competitive with other insurance instruments. Full time (FT) employees can be enrolled in the Anthem Access Health CT plan with considerable savings, with the exception of noting that the deductible rises by \$800. Plans are also set to offer a Health Savings Account to employees through Fidelity. An HSA may be available to PT employees in the future. Contributions to those accounts by USH are under consideration for the future. (further details in Treasurer's report which follows)

Item: FY26 budget (2025-2026) Jon Covault

Pledge income as of December 17th (46% of fiscal year) was \$208,017 (or 64% of FY26 \$322,000 pledge total). Total income to date (\$284,500) is approximately \$60,000 ahead of budget on prorated annual basis. Operating expenses to date were \$226,929 or 45% of our 12-month budget expenses of \$505,329.

At the last board meeting there was discussion about the need to increase from 3 to 4 section lead singers. The music program has kept within budget for paid musician expenses, approximately \$1000 under budget to date. For the remainder of the year increasing to 4 section leads would require an additional \$1200 for the music budget (\$2400 annually or an increase from \$7200 to \$9600 for Schola singers).

Prompted by an anticipated 18% increase in health insurance premiums for our full-time employees, and based on comparative premiums for several health insurance plans the board approved in November the change of our health insurance provider for 2026 from a UUA sponsored plan to Anthem Gold PPO with anticipated savings of \$11,000 for calendar year 2026. Both Karolina and Rev Bob have now enrolled with the Anthem plan beginning January 1, 2026. Many thanks to our Finance committee chairperson Rocco Orlando for making this all happen on a short timeline.

Current receivables include \$6,638 anticipated payment for Knox garden water use for Aug-Oct and security grant reimbursement of ~\$15,000 for materials purchased. Thank you to Paul

Cipriano who recently submitted final paperwork to the Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security for releasing the remainder of grant funding.

Item:USH Ministerial Board Report

*I will light Candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.*

- Howard Thurman

Programming and Social Justice

- We have lit a LOT of candles this December – with more to come! The Yuletide Festival was Huge thanks to Deana David who shepherded us all, and to the dozens of USH volunteers who gave their time and attention to this. It was a wonderful event. Also great that Deana scheduled a planning meeting right after, so we could think about 2026 with learnings fresh in our minds. And thank you Gloria Mengual for the flowers!
- Social Justice going strong, with a new prison letter writing campaign along with food, coat and other donations for Horace Bushnell, and ongoing ministries.
- Stories of Our Lives supplementing the several ongoing groups going strong at the USH, as well as outside groups at the building.
- “The Mids” group is slowly trying to get going again – the monthly zoom had quite a few people this month.

Sundays & Special Services, Religious Education

- Very positive feedback on the December mix of services (Solstice, Scrooge, and a snow-threatened but lovely Sally Rogers services). Music has been wonderful.
- Thanks to Michael Shea, Larry Lunden and of course Ben and Georgi for providing music at several events. Thanks also to Paula, Evan, Marye Gail, and all our incredible visual artists. We draw from a deep and vibrant pool of talent here.
- We’ve been seeing new families coming in and several returning, buttressed by the Yuletide Festival and Shahan’s ongoing initiatives.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

- Our hearts go out to the Johnson family at the passing of Ted Johnson. Ted and Nancy have a wonderful family and have had incredible careers; they also have been active at USH and other UU congregations for many decades. They helped create the New Britain UU Fellowship.
- December is often when people who have been absent for a while, or find it hard for various reasons to get to the Society, try and return. Karolina, myself and others have done our best to welcome some familiar and much-appreciated faces.
- Pastoral needs ongoing. The Caring Committee is trying to work to share the load together – always going to be a transition, when Janice has led us so well for so long.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- I believe we made the health care transition successfully – what a production it has been. Massive thanks to Rocco Orlando for guiding us so well and so diligently, and our indefatigable treasurer for dealing with one more huge matter!
- Lots of people have helped us make sure we are managing Karolina's long-deserved holiday – special thanks to Michael for the orders of service, and Helen and Nancy who help out every week so much in the office.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS EVERYONE!!! May your days be merry and bright – with some quiet and lovely dim candlelight mixed in, too. Grateful for you all.

Kind regards,

Rev. Bob

Item: Spirit Life Council, December 22, 2025 Michael Michaud

Worship Associates

WAs met on December 8th. Meetings are now on second Mondays of the month. This was a combination work meeting and annual Holiday meal—“breaking bread together.”

Our pulpit is now filled through June 28th, 2026.

The next phases of worship coordinating include:

- o 1st Thursday Vespers sign up help with Rev. Bob for Feb., March and April

- o Scheduling the WAs for March and April.
- o During April, 2026, planning will start for the Summer services in FH.

Worship Services, November 30 through December 21, 2025

Date Title Pulpit and WA Musician(s)

Person Online Total Minutes

Date Title Pulpit and WA Musician(s) In person Online Total Minutes

November 30 *"Waiting in Vain"* Rev. Bob and Ann LaPorte Bryant Georgi Lekov 134 18 152 58

December 7 *"I Will Live in the Past, the Present and the Future"* Rev. Bob/ Michael Michaud Mabrey/Choir 108 15 123 63

December 14 *"Hope... Peace...Joy...Love"* Sally Rogers/Sue Smolski Sally Rogers/Mabrey 48* 27 75 60

*Snowy morning

December 21 *"Winter Solstice-the Divine Feminine"* Michael, Dana, Margaret Schola Singers, 111 ? ? 68

Rev Bob Greig Shearer

Lisa Burch

Music Ministries

The plan for the Paul Bisaccia fundraising concert includes:

- o Publicized as a rededication of the sanctuary piano after its restoration.
 - o USH Choir/Schola singing.
 - o Deana Davis (solo piece with Paul).
 - o Proceeds benefitting USH Choral Program? Music ministries budget stuff:
 - o Jon noted in his report that, year-to-date, the music program has kept within budget for paid musician expenses (approximately \$1,000 under budget).
- From Jon: For the remainder of the year increasing to 4 section leads would require an additional \$1,200 for the music budget (\$2,400 annually or an increase from \$7,200 to \$9,600 for Schola singers).

- o Meredith would be thrilled to have the USH Choir (with section leads) sing every three weeks from Feb. 1 through June 28. This would be 8 weeks plus a ninth performance for the benefit concert (\$600). .
- o There are two months with 5 Sundays during Winter/Spring: March 29th and May 31st. Might these be music Sundays with proceeds from the collection benefitting the USH Choral Program?
- o Lastly, a Jazz Service, could end up tapping the Guest Musician budget. Some thought will need to go into this if we are going to do this before the end of the church year. And, it could wait until next year too.

Volunteer recruitment for tenors and bases (this is my own observation). We are a bit short with steady USH members in these sections. The section leads help compensate, but it would be nice to do some outreach/recruitment.

Item: Membership Report

Membership Report Board Meeting December 22, 2025

December attendance at Sunday services has ranged from 48-134 folks in the pews with another 20+ in the choir on the dates that they sing. 12-27 people attend on-line as well.

A snow day accounted for only 48 people in-house but fully 27 on-line.

Visitors continue to make their way to USH. Usually 1-3 people offer their email so that they can be included in our various notifications but probably three times those numbers arrive but do not sign in. Everyone is encouraged to seek out visitors with a welcome (and a suggestion that they sign the visitor form or call the office). When we have a visitor's email address, the weekly e-news and the Sunday service reminder become excellent ways of engaging visitors and encouraging their return.

First Connections, the monthly gathering for newcomers was held December 7th with 8 newcomers in attendance as well as 3 members and a visit with Rev Bob.. Discussion was lively with good engagement. The next First Connections will be held January 4th (2026!)

New member classes will be held Sunday 1/18/26 after service and Tuesday 1/27/25 in the evening, repeating a similar two session format with Rev Bob and Laurie Kelliher. The New Member Ceremony will follow in February.

Submitted, Laurie Kelliher

Item: Social Justice Report Judy Sullivan

Three USH have attended a half day training by the Hartford Deportation group. Also attending were CT Students Interfaith group and members of St Anthony's church. One goal is to develop three-session trainings about documentation packets for people at risk and to have them available at soup kitchens and other sites identified at risk. Community involvement is critical.

Plans in place to continue involvement with the Horace Bushnell Pantry. Fern Street UU has seen an increase in donations for the pantry.

The Noah Webster tutoring program is seeing a resurgence. Peter Meny has 7 new tutors and plans an info session for interested congregants.

The USH GNO services continue to see generous contributions on Sundays.

Item: Security Council has reviewed a video from the UUA on church security/safety. Fern Street is interested in developing a similar info session. Growing coordination among USH, Fern Street and Manchester is continuing on security concerns and specific concerns for youth.

Security concerns for youth.

No guest comments were noted.

Board President Nina Elgo gave closing words.

The chalice was extinguished.

December BOD meeting adjourned at 8 PM.

Next meeting Thursday January 22,2026

Submitted,

Laurie Kelliher for Gloria Mengual