

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting

November 24, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum

NO _____ **YES** **X**

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

Orders of Business

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

Chalice lighting and opening words with Nina Elgo.

Approval October 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –

All in favor. Minutes accepted.

Item: **REALM**

Karolina Wojtysko, Church Operations Manager presented updates on the adoption of the REALM system to enhance USH communication within the organization. BOD was asked to sign on to the program and begin to explore its utility. Majority of BOD was able to “onboard”. Updates will proceed as staff, BOD, families and members become more familiar with sharing information in the life of USH. RE teachers can share lesson plans, links to curriculum. Event notifications can be highlighted and circulated. Brian Harvey and Karolina Wojtysko will develop groups (work, social groups, etc) within the USH community and staff. The Search Directory will act as a map. Unclear whether private conversations are possible within the program. Rev Bob did note that he doubted pastoral concerns would take place within REALM.

Item: **Sound System**

Multiple difficulties with the current sound system; many stemming from multiple systems piggybacked and cobbled together over 50 years of changing and challenging technologies. A recent memorial system was interrupted when the

router was not working. Diana Cipriano is the only staff member addressing sound and her 5 hours/ week are limited given the complexity of the system. Sunday services are best served by three people, rental expectations are high and often complex. Possible next step is to consider formal sound assessment before pursuing repairs or augmentation.

Item: Health Insurance Rocco Oralndo

Refer to Rocco's concil report below for details on various employee insurance plans. Assessment suggests that the Anthem Gold Plan will be more cost-effective than the UUA plan offering a broad network in Connecticut and comparable benefits with the exception of a higher deductible (\$2000 vs. \$1200 for the UUA plan).

With the approval of the board, I have engaged an insurance broker who I have worked with in the past to assist with enrollment.

Item: Religious Education Shahan Islam,DRE joined the BOD meeting via Zoom.

RE attendance is recently lower as the holidays approach. A family with 4 children has left and another moved. The parents had participated as teachers so reducing RE attendance is affected as well as teacher volunteers. Teacher recruitment remains low.

Currently the program is divided into a Youth class and one for younger children.

Youth Group attendance is best on Soup Sunday with John Bengtson

Retreats have been well attended and there is a tentative plan for a May or June retreat.

Congregational RE questionnaire responses included the suggestion that discussion points on the Sunday RE lessons could be developed for families as they drive home.

Item: Security issues.

See Council on Administration report below. As rentals and Meeting House activities increase access to the building is a concern. Several times access doors have been propped open or not secured on exit. Hartford Gay Men's Chorus has keys to entry and the Sathya Sai Center uses the lower entrance. Limiting access through front door only, code entry (keyless), using only "do not duplicate-marked keys) are suggested as well as re-enforcement of not propping doors open. For those groups without door code, a "greeter" would be necessary at the entry (GHIAA events, Indivisible and other rentals).

A motion was also raised by Laura Cipriano and seconded by Judy Sullivan to develop a "no firearms" policy on the grounds or in the building of USH.

USH Ministerial Board Report

Rev. Bob Janis

November24, 2025 *"Love wholeheartedly, be surprised, give thanks and praise – there you will discover the fullness of your life" David Steindl-Rast*

Sundays & Special Services, Religious Education

- Preached about everyday grief, an episode of Anarchist history in the congregation, and Frankenstein. Hopefully the sermons weren't too similar.
- I've said this before, but bears repeating: a really strong cadre of Worship Associates is getting stronger. They regularly make Vespers even better too.
- Been in discussions with Shahan and lay leaders about the best mix of programming – mix across ages, but also the mix in terms of weekly programming and special events – to support the spiritual and community needs of young people and families. Some good initiatives under way.

Programming and Social Justice

- October to December is often a busy season, and that's certainly true here. Gave an introduction at a Civil Liberties conference held at USH, took part in a moving Kristallnacht service at Beth Israel, attended a Holocaust storytelling event (with Matthew Dix one of the presenters) at the JCC, went to a historic housewarming with our own Steve Gavron, etc. All really wonderful events.
- Adult RE Course "Stories of our Lives" is going pretty well and enjoying the "learning challenge" of having different classes for Zoom and for in-person. We're trying out something similar with "The Mids" – a monthly Zoom call on the second Friday evening of the month, and then events on different days.
- Yuletide Festival is impeccably planned – thank you, Deanna David, and to the many volunteers getting ready for it.
- There are quite a lot of different initiatives going on in terms of social justice, with increased needs at the food pantry and many members involved in immigration initiatives like Hartford Deportation Defense. I was quite impressed being reminded of all that was going on, and Judy Sullivan's leadership in coordinating between all our leaders.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

- Quite a lot of pastoral connections and meetings are happening.
- Had a great conversation about funeral receptions going forward. Janice Newton prepared a wonderful list of what needs to be done with regards to receptions, the memorial garden, and funerals generally.
- Great visit to Doncaster and hope to go again to Seabury and Avery Heights soon.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- Boring but important: looking forward to seeing where Realm database systems can take us. It's already coming in handy in different areas, and we need to think about what will be useful in the future (and I think Realm will).
- Thanks to Karolina for setting up our Staff meeting – looking forward to coordinating with staff again this year. And hope to have another staff yearly dinner in December or January.
- Neither trip is set in stone yet, but I hope to get away around January 10-16 and also February 14-19. I've coordinated with Michael around services, grateful for the flexbile. It's nice to have some time away in the middle of the "church year". As with last summer, I plan to be around USH for some but not all of the summer (and will be around for General Assembly, as it's on Zoom).

Here's to the fullness of life!

Kind regards,

Rev. Bob

COUNCIL REPORTS

Community Within – Laura Cipriano

Events this fall include:

- Halloween Howl Wed. Oct 29 – was well planned and fun for all
- Pie al la Mode Sun. Nov 30 – sweet or savory pies
- The Yuletide Festival Dec. 6 still needs volunteers especially for set up the day before and morning of and clean up Saturday evening
- Meeting House Presents 137 attendees for November's Slambovian concert

New volunteers are needed for:

- The Sunday Coffee Hour Book Table
- Event Setup and Cleanup – people organizing events are responsible for setup, cleanup, and securing the building. A team of on-call volunteers would be great.

Caring Network:

Janice Newton, Mike Covault, Laura Cipriano, and Rev. Bob met on Nov. 20 to discuss what the current and future practices are for Memorial Services. Janice Nwton provided a comprehensive packet detailing everything that goes into planning a memorial reception including contacts for buying flower arrangements and nameplates for the memorial board.

Administration – Paul Cipriano

Security Committee Minutes Sunday November 2, 2025 Members (Present*): Dana ?Donovan*, David Newton*, Diana Heymann*, Fred Louis*, Janice Newton, Jonathan Covault, Judy Sullivan, Karolina Wojtysko*, Kevin Girard*, Larry Lunden*, Laura Cipriano*, Laurie Kelliher,

Margaret eicach, Lu Giamatteo, Michael Michaud, Mike J. Covault, Paul Cipriano*, Rev. Bob Janis, Rick Tsukada, Ron Sexton, Shahan Islam, Sue Tenorio, Nancy Kemmerer, Tina Davies, Laurel Goodgion*

Building security and using the main lobby door codes to gain entry to the meetinghouse was discussed. On Sunday morning there is a greeter at the door but at other times the door is propped open or left unlocked with no one to monitor who enters the building.

Various solutions were discussed including sensors to alert occupants when a door is left open for a short period of time. Educating those who use the building about the importance of monitoring the main entrance and using the key codes for attendees rather than propping the door open or leaving it unlocked.

Karolina will meet with the renters and groups who use the building to remind them of the policy of not propping doors open. Karolina will also remind them to check the building for heat left on, lights left on, checking that the elevator is empty and entry doors used are secured before leaving.

New grant funding has become available for security from the federal government. It was the consensus of the committee that at present security is much improved in the building. Rather than adding more security monitoring equipment the committee thought education of the congregation and groups using the building was the best way forward to improve security. All members agreed we want to remain a welcoming community and interaction with those who enter our building is the best preventative medicine to improving security in our meetinghouse.

Exterior lighting would be a possibility for improving the security and safety of the parking areas and entryways. The application deadline for the grant is December 12, 2025.

First Aid training and a defibrillator were discussed. Unfortunately neither of those are considered acceptable under the security grant. USH is fortunate to have medical professionals in the congregation who have helped when they are present, and a medical emergency occurs.

Also USH is fortunate to have a congregant donor who is purchasing a defibrillator to have in the building for emergencies.

Fire alarms were also discussed, and USH does have some in the building and we have heat and water detectors in the lobby of the building that are monitored and will alert designated members of USH if needed. We have fire extinguishers around the building in strategic locations and fire blankets in both kitchen areas as well as first aid kits.

Flip charts which list emergency response plans are still a work in progress. We have made plans for fire and medical emergencies, but they are not posted. More work needs to be done on other emergency response plans before posting.

Adding more handicapped parking was discussed and is currently being researched by Building and Grounds as well as the Accessibility Committee.

The Security Committee's next meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2025, at Noon in the library. The main topic will be drawing up the remaining emergency response plans for the meeting house.

Spiritual Life – Michael Michaud November 24, 2025

- Worship Associates

WAs met on October 13th. In order to accommodate the WAs who attend choir rehearsals, which occur on Thursday nights, WA meetings will now be the second Monday of each month at 6PM (starts in December).

Our pulpit is now filled through April 5, 2026. Between now and June 30th, only three slots remain open for pulpit guests: two in April and two in May. Rev. Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn, who joined us Sunday for Thanks-Giving will join is in the pulpit again on April 19th

Laurie Kelliher and Rev. Bob had coffee with Rev. Sherry L. Turner following Worship Service on Nov. 16 and an invitation was extended to her to be a pulpit guest. She will be our pulpit guest on March 29th. Rev. Dr. Turner serves as President at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace (formerly the Hartford Seminary).

Sue Smolski is recruiting up to six additional volunteers to become Candle Bowl Lifters during our Candles of Memory and Hope ritual. Worship Associates are responsible for contacting these volunteers for each Sunday service. The volunteers must be able to lift candle bowls and walk with them; complete a brief orientation; commit by noon on Friday before the service; and, arrive by 10:20 a.m. the day of the service to check in with the Worship Associate.

Miriam Byroade is on a leave of absence until she completes her graduate degree. Miriam plans on being back in the pulpit as a WA by either summer or fall of 2026.

WAs and Rev. Bob updated Our Vision of Worship at USH, a document in the WA Handbook that is revised every two years.

- Our Vision of Worship at USH

Every worship service will:

Create and sustain a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment in which the congregation can fully immerse themselves in worship.

Use a liturgical framework that is familiar, and yet creative, to inspire a deeply spiritual and transformative experience, that nurtures inner peace, quiet contemplation, meditation, prayer, thought, and holds a place for the full range of human experience, including playfulness, joy, sorrow.

Strengthen our Unitarian Universalist identities, uphold our Principles and Values, while drawing from a multitude of Sources.

Offer the highest quality possible in all elements of the worship service.

- Music Ministries

The full choir sang on Nov. 9 (Anarchy in the USH), and will sing again on Dec 8 (I Will Live in the Past, the Present and the Future) and Christmas Eve (Christmas

carols at 4:30PM and Worship Service at 5PM). We intend to have Benjamin Mabrey at the organ for some of the hymns.

The chancel layout changed for the Nov. 9 service with the piano relocated to the pulpit side of the chancel and the choir returned to the organ side. This seems to have created sufficient room for the choir while maintaining access to the chancel for people with mobility needs and sufficient egress in the event of an emergency. B and G members were involved in the discussion around the revised configuration and appreciate the sensitivity to concerns about accessibility and emergency egress.

Meredith has volunteered to have the USH Choir sing a few pieces at the Paul Bisaccia fundraising concert. Deana David has also volunteered to sing a cabaret act or two. As decided at last month's Board meeting, I will chair a small workgroup to launch the concert (late-winter or early-spring). It would be wonderful if the choir is part of the promotion of event and the funds raised benefit the choral program. Board member's thoughts on this are appreciated.

Maybe at the December Board meeting we can look at the Choral Section leads budget the spring semester of 2026 (January through June). We had originally budgeted for three section leads (expecting Sarah McKenzie to be a volunteer section lead), but in reality we hired all four section leads per choir service. Meredith has recruited church vocalists that are among the absolute finest in the area (we are fortunate). Their importance in aiding the quality of the choir is invaluable. Meredith has maximized the gain of having these talented section leads as they also comprise the USH Schola Singers with no additional costs for this extra group. I can work with Meredith to produce a revised Choral Section Leads budget (with Jon's help) for the Board to consider next month.

<i>Worship Services, November 2 through November 23, 2025</i>							
Date	Title	Pulpit and WA	Musician(s)	In-Person	Online	Total	Minutes
2-Nov	<i>Fragile Ember</i>	Owen McKenzie and Miriam	Sarah, Colin and Noah McKenzie	109	29	138	59

9-Nov	<i>Anarchy in the USH</i>	Rev. Bob and Ben Harvey	USH Choir, USH Schola Singers and Georgi	118	16	134	69
16-Nov	<i>Theese Days</i>	Rev. Bob and Rick	Sarah McKenzie, Meredith and Georgi	118	16	134	65
23-Nov	<i>Thanks-Giving</i>	Rev. Julie-Ann Silberman -Bunn and Sue	Benjamin Mabrey	108	13	121	56

Social Justice Council ~ *Judy Sullivan*

1. GNO (Good Neighbor Offering)

September: Levo International

\$1,604.10

October: Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry 3,107.84

November: Hispanic Health Council

December: Hawkwing

January: Operation Fuel

2. Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry

Diana Heymann continues to find new resources – the latest being individuals and congregants at UCWH. While some USH members are helping pack food packs, it has become apparent that the donations to West Hartford far exceed those to Hartford. The WH food bank has been donating overflow to the UCWH Food Ministry, and they are kindly spreading word of the need at Horace Bushnell.

3. Noah Webster Tutoring

Peter Meny has organized 6 tutors since October and looking for more to start in January.

4. Immigration Organizing

- HB8004 Passed and was signed by Gov. Lamont

- *Courthouse Protections:* The bill expanded the courthouse protections to include the wider courthouse grounds, which includes any court owned parking lot or walkways.
- *Data Protections:* HB8004 put into law specific data protections so that ICE can't get access to information that the state of Connecticut has on immigrant residents. This protection is intended to protect the personal information of immigrants who have drive-only licenses, HUSKY Medicaid, or other information that the state of CT has.
- *What was not included*
 - Remote hearings so that people have access to virtual court hearings and don't have to go to court
 - Protection of the current HUSKY 4 Immigrants program and healthcare access for the immigrants that will be losing their healthcare
 - Prohibiting the use of state or local resources from being used for immigration enforcement, for example usage of the CT National Guard
- Interfaith Family Ministry
- Red Folder training being scheduled in Hartford (C4D)
- Accompaniment training scheduled mid Dec by HDD
- USH volunteers requested Rapid Response information from HDD

Judy Sullivan
11/24/2025

Finance Council Report Rocco Orlando Board Meeting 11-24-2025

- Year end appeal to fulfill pledges – will discuss during Board Message 12-7-25
- Endowment Update
 - Balance of \$2,823,313 as of 10-31-25
 - Monthly draws of \$5,069 for USH operations
 - Capital expenditures for architect fees and emergency work on one clerestory window of \$9,111
 - Capital expenditure of \$58,900 for the heat pumps
 - Capital expenditure \$9,775 for grand piano maintenance
 - Endowment Committee considering recommendation for additional Endowment Campaign for late summer or early fall 2026 with particular attention to education about planned giving strategies
- Timing of the Annual Stewardship Campaign – this typically occurs in the March-April timeframe
- Potential large pending capital expenditures

- Clerestory window remediation – estimate pending architectural analysis
- Parking lot re-paving will require new estimate and prioritization

USH Insurance Options

INDIVIDUAL PLANS	Deductible	Annual Cost		NOTES	
Anthem Gold PPO with Dental/vision – Individual (age 50)	\$2000 deductible	\$15,473 Annual- no subsidy applied (not eligible)			
Anthem Gold PPO with Dental/vision – Individual (age 36)	\$2000 deductible	\$5955 Annual \$394 exchange subsidy applied based on income	\$10,683 without exchange subsidy	Status of subsidies uncertain without federal legislation	
Anthem Gold Individual	\$4000 deductible	\$14,024 Annual			
Connecticare	Only High deductible available (6-8,000)	Did not price because of high deductible			
ACCESS HEALTH CT (EXCHANGE PLANS)					
Access Health CT Anthem Gold (includes dental) (age 50)	\$2000 deductible	\$14,632			

Access Health CT Anthem Gold (includes dental) (age 36)		\$5984 \$253 subsidy applied based on income	\$9030 without subsidy	Subsidy based on total family income – not just employee	
Access Health CT Anthem Gold (includes dental) (age 36) Family Plan	\$2000 deductible	\$9455 \$1211 subsidy applied	\$23,987 without subsidy		
Access Health CT Connecticare Gold (no dental)	\$1200 deductible	\$16,743		Dental adds \$60/mo.	
UUA PLAN					
UUA PPO (2026) (age 50)		\$21089			
UUA PPO (2026) (age 36)		\$14,411			

Submitted

Rocco Orlando

Membership Report Board Meeting November 25, 2025

November attendance at Sunday services has ranged from 109-118 folks in the pews with another 20+ in the choir on the dates that they sing. 13-29 people attend on-line as well.

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 visitors' 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 November 2nd with 8 newcomers in attendance as well as 4 members. Discussion was lively with good engagement. The next First Connections will be held December 7th.

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

USH Treasurer Report November 24, 2025 Submitted by Jon Covault
FY26 budget (2025-2026).

Pledge income as of November 16th (1/3rd of fiscal year) was \$165,728 (51% of FY26 \$322,000 pledge total). Rental income of \$18,000 is 20% ahead of budget. Sunday plate giving to USH was \$5,223 which is 30% ahead of budget and social justice giving (including Village uniform drive) was \$9,900 considerably above budget.

Operating budget expenses for were 27% of annual budget for first 1/3 of year.

Increased health insurance premiums present a threat to the FY26 budget.

The finance committee will present options to our current plan.

Receivables include \$8,500 anticipated payment for Knox garden water use and security grant reimbursement of ~\$15,000 for materials previously purchased.

- **CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE**
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- **MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Nina adjourned meeting at 8 p.m.

[illegible]