

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting October 27, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum NO__YES__X

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

Orders of Business

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

September 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –

Orlando moved that meeting minutes be accepted. Approval: unanimous.

RE Teacher Recruitment – Survey Feedback:

Virginia – Recruitment of Teachers – Discussion among 3 congregations – RE Committee work. **Participant concerns, as reflected in survey:**

- Building relationships, building understanding and being a good citizen (being part of actions) – what youth described as concerns
- Lack of teaching experience
- Lack of familiarity with content
- Group size: Estimated number of youth participants – 8 -10 middle/high school youth; 3 – 5 youth
- RE group is forming to work on program, which collapsed with COVID.
- Number of youth in congregation: Rev Bob: Estimate – 30 or so (varies by week).

Minister's Report – Rev. Bob – (See complete report in Addendum below)

- See Addendum below for his report.

Sound System – Virginia

- Need to reach agreement on overall goal – something that does not take time and energy from a very small group responsible for this.
- Thoughts in terms of direction we can give to AV group?
- Michael – over summer sound system compromised services. Sue Smolski noted that ongoing shortcomings of sound system negatively impact services.

Source of frustration and embarrassment. Karolina notes that we need a system that can be run by anyone beyond usual folks at USH who run the sound system.

- Michael has heard numbers between \$40,000 and \$120,000 to provide USH with ideal system with strong sound. What can work best for us, and what does that design look like?
- Paul – regardless of system used and its quality, it's not always going to work.
- Virginia – wanted: reliability, ease of use: If Diana or someone else who normally operates system is out, it still can be run well. If we put together some instructions, we would have a check list. Need small planning group to focus on this, along with a Train-the-Trainer option.
- Paul – much of what we have in terms of speaker sound system is high quality and works well. Two different mixes are being used – one in USH office and the other being used by Rick in sanctuary.
- Rev. Bob – of importance is reliability and ease of use for groups renting. Would love to have one person in charge of audio, rather than a group. One person holding responsibility for this is best. It would be good to have a sound check on the WA side. Meredith communicating with Diana in advance of services is good move in positive direction. We want to create smoothest experience that we can.
- Jon- Rick Tsukada is interested in working on this with Diana. We have one PT paid staff person to do sound work. We need more people to work on this.
- Michael – doing a feasibility study of what would work best for us makes sense.
- Jon – need to identify price range we are considering.
- Rev. Bob – Vimeo offers better sound quality, but Zoom provides people attending virtually to communicate with each other after a service, which is important.
- Karolina, Rick, Paul C. and Diana C. are the group working on sound system. Michael would be involved in communication of ongoing WA needs to the group.

COUNCIL REPORTS

- **Community Within– *Laura Cipriano***
 - Perhaps a pie-a-la-mode for week after Thanksgiving. (See other activities in her notes in addendum below)
- **Administration – *Paul Cipriano***
 - Indivisible is hosting an event. Paula and Aaron are helping USH program the lighting, given their experience with theatre lighting.
 - Heat pump B & G has been working on this and will test October 28. This will be a much more efficient way to heat and cool. Needs to be inspected.
 - Need to raise awareness of importance of keeping door closed/locked, checking lights and heat. Virginia: how to spread the word about this? Rev. Bob – enews and word of mouth work well. Karolina and I can work on this. Laurie – noting where switches controlling lights in hallways, etc is important.
 - Paul – people should know that some USH folk can allow remote access to USH from their home (USH folk with this capability).

- **Spiritual Life ~ Michael Michaud**
 - When choir performs there is on average a 20% increase in attendance. Section leads are budgeted.
 - Anyone who wants to sing need only commit to the two rehearsals
- **Social Justice – Judy Sullivan** – Group to receive USH donations in November is Hispanic Health Council
- **Jon** – USH received 501c3 approval. Our status as a religious charity did not require an annual financial report.
- **GUEST COMMENTS –**
 - David Newton – There is a misconception that machines have the magic capabilities of doing all of the AV work. You must marry equipment with someone who has the ability to run it. This will reduce your error rate.
- **CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE –**
Rev. Bob – Regarding the last couple of minutes of our most recent service... Doctors on staff tended to Jim, others called ambulance, others cared for Jim's wife, Ellie. It's incredible what our community can do together.
- **MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Virginia adjourned meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Addendums – October 2025 Reports

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis

"When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." —Audre Lorde

These are, I know, difficult times for us all, in one way or another. Let's keep engaging in that which engages our spirit, let's keep meeting together, and let's keep at the work of helping each other find meaning, basic rights, and hope. Here's to what we can do together at USH.

Programming and Social Justice

- There have been a lot of opportunities for people to engage in social justice, organizing, charity and resistance: Gloria's excellent story-sharing; lots of our people attending No Kings and the Immigration Hartford rally; the Levo urban farming initiative; Horace Bushnell; etc. etc. We're the site for another big organizing event at our congregation, Saturday November 8th. There is still a lot more we could be doing; but it feels like there has been a shift from justice work to being something a fair number of our people do, to justice work being something the whole congregation does, just in different ways.
- Adult RE Course "Stories of our Lives" had well attended first sessions both online and Zoom. It's been an engaging conversation, I believe. First Thursdays has Georgi playing some months, and mixing it up some months.
- Great to have the Yuletide Festival AND the October pumpkin meeting to add to our roster with the monthly fil, the Tuesday lunch, etc. – thanks to Deanna for her leadership, and everyone for pitching in to plan and to help.

- We had a bit of extended summer hiatus in “The Mids” 30s-50s group, but we’re going to try restarting it with a monthly quick zoom social connection to augment the social gatherings.

Sundays & Special Services, Religious Education

- Music program is off and running! Working with Meredith has been excellent and she’s got great vision and flexibility.
- We have chosen a few Sundays to have the “Time For All Ages” and are seeing how it goes. Some of the younger kids may get a bit restless upstairs – but that’s part of the charm.
- A nice mix of services, great topics and lively speakers. We are running a bit long, I’m well aware – we are working on trimming the services here and there, and keeping them roughly in the 60-minute range, with rare exceptions.
- Religious Education rejuvenating is going well. My thanks to Virginia, Shahan, Nina, and everyone who signed up for the Religious Education Committee. We have got a fantastic group for the RE Committee; the Neighboring Faiths curriculum seems to be going well; and lots of good survey responses. We’ll be trying out some new initiatives and different ways of doing things.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

- Good visit to Seabury and looking forward to visiting Duncaster.
- Plenty of pastoral needs out there – even more so with the world falling apart a bit, so to speak, structurally and psychologically. Meeting people where and how I can, but let’s keep our eyes open for ways to be of service in these times. A few opportunities for community can go a long way.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- Thanks to Rocco who set it up, had a very good meeting with President Ward and his Chief of Staff, Molly Polk. They asked if we could be a local resource in times of emergency, which I hope would be a no-brainer for us. They also gave us some guidance into how to apply for internships. They are hosting a Neighborhood Community Breakfast this spring (date TBD) for us, JCC, The Village, Watkinson, etc.
- Rev. Josh Pawelek approached me about building capacity for Pink Haven. Pink Haven (<https://www.pinkhaven.org/>) helps protect Trans people. In particular here, we could offer resources and sanctuary for Trans people who are relocating to CT out of safety. If we were to help with this, a keep resource would be congregants who would be willing to offer a spare bedroom (or couch) for days or weeks.
- Reached out and plan to share information on holidays with Revs. Josh and Adam, other area congregations.
- Looking forward to getting Realm going here. Also in the digital world, there continues to be a sharp uptick in scams and phishing attempts (Realm would help make us less susceptible to those), and Karolina had the good idea of a scam literacy workshop – could be useful, though don’t know who would lead it.

Here’s to the work we do together!

2.. USH Treasurer Report ~ Jon Covault

- **501(c)(3)** Our application approval letter dated Oct. 9, 2025 was recently received effective June 30, 2025. We are considered a tax-exempt public charity and not required to file an annual financial report. Thanks to all involved, especially Karolina, Nancy Kemerrer, Joe Rubin and Rev. Bob. Seems remarkable to have approval issued during the government shutdown. A PDF of the letter attached for Board records.
- **FY26 budget (2025-2026)**
 - Pledge income as of September 30 was \$126,619 (39% of FY26 \$322,000 pledge total). Total income in FY26Q1 (25% of FY) was \$154,350 including \$10,369 in remaining paycheck protection program funds (31% of budget). Operating budget expenses for FY26Q1 were \$107,333 or 27% of annual budget.
 - We received notification from our UUA Insurance carrier that health insurance premiums will increase by 19% next calendar year which translates to \$5,000 expense for USH and \$1,250 combined for Karolina and Rev. Bob. This increase is similar to that expected for unsubsidized ACA plans but higher than typical employer-sponsored plan. Gemni Ai reports– “The UUA plan is notable for its commitment to comprehensive, inclusive, and equitable coverage, often being ahead of the curve compared to commercial or even some other faith-based plans. Explicitly covered gender-affirming care and ...offers comprehensive women's health services.” Consideration of options could be explored if we develop an active HR committee.
 - Endowment funding of capital improvement projects in FY26Q1 (\$86,800) included chancel lighting, heat pump installation for the library and 2 adjacent rooms, re-carpeting of Music office/rooms and restoration of the sanctuary grand piano.

FY26Q1 USH accounts balance sheet summary – Total endowment funds are \$2,915,800, c/w end FY24Q1 of \$1,334,322. Funds for monthly support of operations and capital expenses are held in money market “cash account”

<u>date</u>	<u>account balance</u>	<u>dvd interst</u>	<u>change market</u>	<u>deposits</u>	<u>notes</u>	<u>total withdrawal</u>	<u>expense/fees</u>	<u>budgeted withdrawal</u>	<u>Other USH withdrawal</u>	<u>notes</u>
FY26 Q1	Main endowment		HA 07854 LR							
6/30/25	\$ 1,868,150.26									
7/31/25	\$ 1,896,888.12	\$ 2,143.99	\$ 13,306.02	\$ 18,360.00	endo giving	\$ (5,072.15)	\$ (5,072.15)			
8/31/25	\$ 1,972,646.90	\$ 1,982.43	\$ 52,479.61	\$ 21,296.74	\$1500 cash gift + 1:1 match		\$19796.74			
9/30/25	\$ 2,020,026.92	\$ 7,334.10	\$ 40,045.92							
FY26 Q1	Capital Improvement		HA 16908 LR							
6/30/25	\$ 259,271.81									
7/31/25	\$ 261,038.22	\$ 263.10	\$ 2,087.17			\$ (583.86)	\$ (583.86)			
8/31/25	\$ 209,340.40	\$ 235.16	\$ 6,967.02			\$ (58,900.00)				wd for lib heat pump 1/2 M&T 1/2 Cash UBS
9/30/25	\$ 214,812.38	\$ 755.03	\$ 4,716.95							
FY26 Q1	Anonymous Donor		HA 19943 LR							
6/30/25	\$ 422,921.94									
7/31/25	\$ 425,093.44	\$ 462.48	\$ 2,777.96			\$ (1,068.94)	\$ (1,068.94)			
8/31/25	\$ 437,901.80	\$ 437.58	\$ 12,370.78							
9/30/25	\$ 448,887.30	\$ 1,648.73	\$ 9,336.77							
Total endowment at USB										
9/30/25	\$ 2,813,439.19									
FY26 Q1	Cash account		HA 20455							
6/30/25	\$ 136,050.66									
7/31/25	\$ 122,332.98	\$ 462.49				\$ (14,180.17)		\$ (5,069.17)	\$ (9,111.00)	\$3850 archit+\$5261 emer repairs
8/31/25	\$ 147,179.39	\$ 465.58		\$ 29,450.00		\$ (5,069.17)		\$ (5,069.17)		deposit frm Cap Imp endow library heat pump
9/30/25	\$ 129,712.59	\$ 468.37				\$ (17,935.17)		\$ (5,069.17)		9775 for GrandPiano repairs 3091 for clerestory work
FY25 Q4	Schwab reserves									
6/30/25	\$ 253,047.74									
7/31/25	\$ 254,335.02	\$ 923.35	\$ 1,206.93			\$ (843)				CD int 920.30
8/31/25	\$ 281,292.59	\$ 108.72	\$ 9,533.32	\$ 52,481.80	220 sh aapl pledg	\$ (35,166)		(10,369.53)	PPP FY26 budget	
9/30/25	\$ 291,227.38	\$ 441.35	\$ 9,093.44	\$ 400.00					(19,796.74)	endow matching 97 sh Aapl;
edowment funds at Schwab										
	\$ 102,361.26									(5k) transfer to M&T lighting donation
Total endow:	\$ 2,915,800.45									
FY25 Q4	M+T Checking									net change
6/30/25	\$ 77,316.58									
7/31/25	\$ 76,149.30			\$ 75,171.79		\$ (76,290.07)	\$ (49.00)			
8/31/25	\$ 125,089.20			\$ 110,213.16		\$ (61,214.26)	\$ (59.00)	returned check	\$29,450	check outstanding for library heat pump
9/30/25	\$ 72,587.44			\$ 39,792.02		\$ (92,244.78)	\$ (49.00)	returned check	\$29,450	outstanding check cleared
semi-annual \$10,955 ins premium										

○ Spirit Life Council Report ~ Michael Michaud Worship Associates

WAs met on October 9th (Second Thursday of each month).

□ Our pulpit is now filled through March 22, 2026.

- Some noted pulpit guests returning for early 2026 include Rev. Stephen Kendrick, Storyteller Matt Dicks, and Judy Robbins. Rev. Stephen had advised USH a few years ago about the need to develop a strong choir; Meredith has scheduled the choir to sing for Rev. Stephen's Sunday.
- All three new WAs have now had a chance to work with Rev. Bob for a service (Carl, Deana and Melissa). Both orientation sessions for new WAs has been completed and the norientation process has concluded. With that said, Michael will continue to mentor Carl, as will Margaret for Deana and Laurie for Melissa.
- I am discerning, along with others, how to better conceptualize our two levels of WAs:
 - 1) those who work as WAs primarily with Rev. Bob and
 - 2) those who can also work as worship coordinators or worship team leaders with pulpit guests. The latter requires more time to invest, more experience, and significantly more time in creating the service and OOS.

Music Ministries

- The USH full choir sang again for the Oct. 26th service with Rev. Bob, Bumps in the Night. The USH Schola singers sang as well and this time it included the four section leads plus

Meredith and Georgi. There were 20 voices inclusive of the section leads.

- The full choir will sing again on Nov. 9, Dec. 8 and Christmas Eve.
- To be part of the choir, one needs to attend two Thursday evening rehearsals that prepare for a particular Sunday. One would only show up for those Thursdays if they plan on being there for the particular Sunday. No further commitment is entailed, i.e., entire semester or year, etc.
- We are doing our best to accommodate the needs of a larger choir and are trying out various arrangements in the chancel mindful of the needs of the minister/pulpit guest, WAs, Meredith, the choir, tech needs and the chancel artists. This is a wonderful problem to have—a larger choir!
- Paid singers are hired by Meredith consistent with the guidelines and budget passed by the Board for this year. Some Sundays have been “USH Schola Singers” only, i.e., the paid singers. Worship Services since Last Board Meeting (attendance/duration)
- Sept. 28, Belonging—Finding Our Place in Love and Community - Rev. Diane Daniels and Peter Meny - 82 plus 20 online (total 102) 1 hour 12 minutes
- October 5, Moving Forward Together - Rev. Bob and Carl Shields; USH Schola Singers - 105 plus 8 online (total 112) 1 hour 12 minutes
- October 12, Chamber Music and the Accidental Theist John Stowe and Rick Tsukada, New World Trio- 104 plus 7 online (total 111) 1 hr 35 min.
- October 29, Who Are Your Heroes- Fred Louis and Margaret Leicach - 99 plus 9 online (total 108) 58 min.
- October 26, Bumps in the Night- Rev. Bob and Melissa Gatica, USH Choir and Schola Singers- 117 plus 16 online (total 133) 58 min.

Religious Education

I defer to Rev. Bob’s report on this.

○ **Community Within Report – Laura Cipriano**

New events this fall include:

- Halloween Howl Wed. Oct 29
- “Attacks on Science” Seminar Nov. 11
- Pie al la Mode Sun. Nov 30
- The Yuletide Festival Dec. 6

New volunteers are needed for:

- The Sunday Coffee Hour Book Table
- Caring Network – meeting Nov. 16
- Memorial Receptions
- 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.

Communications: Judy Robbins brings us the USHer, our bi-monthly online magazine. Tina Davies and Karolina produce weekly Enews and Gatherings & Events updates. The new webpage has been well received. Webpages are like gardens; they are never finished. Gardens always need weeding and new plants added. When you find anything on the webpage that needs to be updated or changed, let Karolina or Laura know.

Returning activities and events this fall include Gentle Yoga, Joy of Writing, Head & Hearts, Book Club, Pizza & Movie, Hiking Group, Lunch Bunch, Disability Support Group,

Singalong Group, Men's Group, Artist's Way, Parent's Grief Group, Magdalene Circle, and Meeting House Presents

On hold for now: Genealogy Group, Mids, Regifting Sale, Auction

Administration Council Update– Paul Cipriano

- There are a few things happening with further training on the new lighting for the chancel. Paula and Aaron Blech who have experience with theatrical lighting have volunteered to help program the lighting and train us on its capabilities.
- Clip-on microphones for Rev. Bob and The WAs is being purchased to improve the audio portion of Sunday services.
- Ongoing education of users of the building needs to take place. Examples of things that need to be stressed: not propping open doors now that everyone who needs access has a code to unlock the doors. Important: when you are in the building and see a door open and unattended, close it and let the occupants know why. This is not only a security issue but an environmental and economic issue now, with it being heating season.
- The new heat pump/air conditioning splitters installation is nearly complete. We are waiting for the electrician to connect the units to a power supply and then for inspection. The individual room heating and cooling capabilities should be more efficient than using the boilers and portable air conditioners. It's important to only run the units when the rooms are occupied.
- There is approximately \$5,200 left in the security grant and we applied for a grant modification request to install more cameras around the building. There is now coverage of more of the parking lot, solar panel area, Memorial Garden entry, the hallways and entryways in Fellowship Hall and the Chapel.
- The cameras can be viewed in the main office on the monitor and remotely by a phone app. A majority of the public areas in the meeting house now have closed circuit video coverage.
- Indivisible CT is presenting another discussion at USH about the current events in the country under the Trump Administration. This one is about the attempts to dismantle science. Discussion will cover what has happened and what comes next and will feature a faculty member from Trinity College. It will be publicized in the Enews as well as the Sunday order of service event insert for the next two weeks, and preregistration is required to attend.



Dismantling Science: What Happened and What Comes Next?

A Conversation with

Sarah Raskin

Professor of Psychology & Neuroscience at Trinity College*

Moderated by

Jeremy Pressman

November 11, 2025 at 7 PM



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- Sunday's medical emergency during service showed USH is prepared to deal with emergencies. 911 was immediately called and congregants helped by staying in their

seats to allow medical personnel to tend to the patient. Congregants with medical expertise provided aid until the EMT's arrived. Kudos to all!

- The annual inspection of the boilers was conducted by Church Mutual, and one of the three boilers needs a relief valve. This should be an inexpensive repair and Kevin is arranging it with Air Temp, the company who services our boilers.