

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting September 22, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum NO__YES_X

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

Orders of Business

6:32 p.m. Nina called the meeting to order.

July 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –

July Board meeting minutes - Nina emailed overview notes from July Board meeting. Gloria emailed Board reports for July, minus the actual meeting minutes. Board was asked to review them; we will approve them at another time.

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

- Ministerial Discretionary Fund – This fund balance was at \$8,700 and now is at \$3,700. See addendum for guidelines established. We have been contacted to help address ICE-related issues, domestic abuse and other circumstances. Rev. Bob is looking for feedback on how to decide on these payments.
- Board noted that they trust Rev. Bob's discretion on this issue.
- Reminder that staff (specific reference to Karolina and Meredith) is stretched thin. Let's be cognizant of their time and other responsibilities.

Building & Grounds - David Newton

- Motion to move amendment – have Board approve significant expenditures. Amount set as rebate needed changes in thermostatic arrangements. Original amount approved was \$62,000. This has been changed to \$64,000. Some will come from grant funding. Vote: Unanimous vote in favor.
- Motion - Updating of carpet for music room – identified as a capital project. Michael moved to approve this and Judy seconded. Unanimous approval. Carpet to be put in place on Friday.

- Clearstory issues – window repair. We have a contract in place to provide a plan for correcting this. David approved small plan to fix this. Correction to be finalized by spring 2026.

Presentation: Danny from REALM (Program to replace Church Windows)

- They have been serving churches and ministries for over 40 years.
- We will have unlimited users. When we want to customize, we can add other people to the Admin side of things.
- Others at USH can access REALM without having access to all of the components of REALM.
- Congregants – what they see. They can click on Connect to access information available to them. They must set up a password to access Connect site. From here they can access the News feed site and other information. They can access their own giving history. They can make gifts, schedule gifts or change gift information, as well as source of payment. Connect shows the groups that one leads. People can manage information others have access to as well.
- Volunteer management tool will also be available for things like chancel lighting, greeter, etc.
- Jumping back to Admin side – there's Contribution side with subcategories. Up to 10 years of contribution history will migrate to the new program. Online giving has a category in this area.
- Danny reviewed Batch 2508 – Gift giving
- Program can personalize communications – cover letters to folks, etc. Can then send bulk emails of this.
- Karolina is recommending replacing Church Windows with this cloud-based option where people can provide input. Other desired benefit: Rev. Bob having access to the contact information of congregants, as well as others on staff.
- Danny was asked, can we repurpose REALM stuff with internal focus to external outreach? Danny: just create a QR code and send that out.
- Danny demonstrated use of REALM for our Winterfest event of December 6th.
- Karolina: cost is \$99.00 per month with a one-month setup fee. Will need help from a few volunteers to help orient staff to become familiar with this program.
- Nina – useful thing would be having members include what they are interested in volunteering in, as well as their specific skill sets.
- **Vote on transitioning to REALM:** Michael made motion to transition to REALM. Paul seconded. Vote: Most of the Board voted in favor, with one abstention.

Consideration and Vote on 501 © (3) language for IRS determination

- Our application has been rejected subject to some desired changes.
 - Next step: File amendment by Oct 9 with Secretary of State to address deficits Need to add some wording.
 - Motion: Made by Judy to make changes to reflect suggested edits requested by IRS. Laura seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

****(Virginia took over leading meeting at 8:05 p.m.)***

COUNCIL REPORTS

- **Community Within– *Laura Cipriano* .**

- Decided to continue Caring Network portion with no lead person right now. **Next meeting: October 26.**

- **Administration – *Paul Cipriano***

- Chancel lighting program needs to have changes made. Lighting could impact sound system. Trying to find home for the choir riser platforms and not move things unless necessary.
- Door – Concern about main entrance being left open. We have security system in place. Have found door propped open with no one there to monitor who is coming in. There is a way to open front door for limited amount of time without leaving it visibly opened. Several USH staff can do this. Need to reflect on the issue of just leaving the door wide open. Virginia: problem can be solved with a doorbell that rings beyond solely the front office. Let's educate people about not leaving front door propped open.
- We need to establish an HR committee. Paul has approached some folks about serving and has been asked what it is that team will do. Karolina: it would be nice to have written policy updates. AUUA has 'friendly officers' to help with HR-related policies. We don't need to start from scratch. It is not uncommon for organizations to hire someone to work on solely the policy side of things.
- Piano repairs have been completed. Cost was \$11,000.
- Virginia – coming up with list of what we would like volunteers to do (being very specific) and getting the word out would be productive.

- **Spiritual Life ~ *Michael Michaud***

- Sent out Excel spreadsheet of Worship Services done, who is leading and focus of service
- After January, music will become more robust. Meredith is working on administrative planning for this now.
- Total of 149 attended the water service in September – a record since pandemic started.

- **GUEST COMMENTS – David** – we need more attention to security, but it is the best we have had in this building to date. Assigned codes are helpful and being used. Front door welcomer is important and impacts first impressions of those entering our building. Also, when you change software, all work stops until people learn new system.

- **Janis** – A couple of concerns: If people put things in refrigerator, they need to take things out. Decaying things are being found there. Also, things like half and half and other things needed on Sundays have gone missing.

- **CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE** –Rev Bob: all of us on the Board have been cared for by this congregation and have cared for others. There are so many ways we have been there for one another. Let us be grateful for this living legacy of care.

- **MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Virginia adjourned meeting at 8:34 p.m.

Addendums – September 2025 Reports

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis

"Ba-dee-ya, dancin' in September

Ba-dee-ya, never was a cloudy day..."

By the great Earth, Wind & Fire (wait, why not water? I guess we'll never know...)

Sundays & Special Services, Religious Education

- We had good attendance throughout the summer and a nice range of uplifting, thoughtful services. Thanks to Michael Michaud and the Worship Associates.
- As mentioned elsewhere in this Board Meeting, we are having some polling and discussion to determine what Religious Exploration looks like in the decades to come. Shahan has nicely set the foundations for this with his ongoing discussions with teachers. And Virginia was really a visionary in putting this poll together – thank you!
- Water Communion was quite the “cast of thousands” service – my thanks to everyone involved, and way-to-go Meredith, kickstarting the new choral program with quite a bang.
- Thought of service topics for most of the rest of 2025; getting hymn suggestions to Meredith.

Programming and Social Justice

- Had a good SJ monthly Zoom. A few of our members have been doing a lot with Hartford Deportation Defense; I’ve been involved with deportation witness at the Stamford Courthouse and now am looking to see what’s needed in Hartford. We also heard from Hispanic Health Council, which has been doing lots of good work in many different areas.
- Had a good amount of interest in the new RE Course, “Stories of our Lives.” Class begins in October
- Yuletide Festival is a great addition to the programming this year. On my end, First Thursday evenings and First Friday mornings are continuing. I inquired about changing first Fridays due to proximity to the monthly First Thursday event, but couldn’t find any better option.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

- A big change is occurring within the Caring Committee with Janice Newton stepping down as leader. It’s impossible to sum up what Janice has meant and continues to mean to the caring of this congregation. The Caring Committee will continue; I think we have a bit of a time to muddle on without a leader before trying to find someone to be the Committee leader.
- Ministerial Discretionary Fund has had quite a few payouts in 2025 (see attached for anonymous breakdown of MDF funds). In this administration a

lot of poor families and poor people are falling through society's cracks. I'd love some thoughts about how to approach this.

- A few hospital visits here and there over the summer and September. Excited to visit Doncaster, as well as Seabury, in the weeks ahead.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- After some staff transition during the past couple of years, we have quite a promising staff team. They're very dedicated. We need to work on not burning them out...lay leaders, please be mindful that Karolina and Meredith's staff hours, in particular, are basically near or at capacity at the moment with everything they have on their plates. That's not to see we want to avoid them! But as leadership we all need to be creative and flexible, and aware that there are limits to how much Karolina can do at full time or Meredith at less than half time...we can start to prioritize.

MDF Payments 2025 through August

January Balance – \$8,758.34
(Note - \$3 monthly service fee)

January 2025

Food & baby formula - \$500

Rent payment - \$350

February

Basic needs - \$200

March

Boiler repair - \$1000

Rent - \$500

Phone Bill - \$200

April

Phone bill - \$100

June

Medical needs - \$800

Rent - \$500

Rent - \$500

Medical - \$400

As of August 2025 - \$3,787.34 *Note: a few rough guidelines about MDF payments*

- 1) The fund is primarily for USH members & attendees who are in a tough spot, so I prioritize that over any "outside request".
- 2) Any "outsider" who is asking for charity needs to meet me in person - I can tell you that this bars well over 90% of requests, even when I offer to drive to meet someone in the Hartford region. "Can you email me a gift card" gets a flat no.
- 3) Generally, payments are limited to \$500, especially for outsiders. Generally, only one payment per calendar year.
- 4) When possible, payments are made directly to cover rent, utility, etc.
- 5) As a reminder, MDF can never go to staff or their families (this is a good rule).

2.. USH Treasurer Report ~ Jon Covault

FY25 budget year (2024-2025) operating budget income and expense final results:

The surplus for FY25 is \$6,665 (operating budget + non-budgeted income/expense). Pledge income received, \$302,179 was 98% of FY25 pledges (\$308,000). Other major sources of income included the endowment contribution for the operating budget of \$64,979, rental income was \$18,714, and offering plate \$8,800. Total income was \$435,373 (FY25 budget \$441,729).

Major expenses included \$297,290 for employee compensation (7% below budget), B&G \$54,644 (8% less than \$59,500 budget), office expenses \$32,650 (5% over budget), liability / fire insurance \$20,600, spirit life \$13,000 (12% below budget), music program \$5,150 (\$4,150 budgeted), religious exploration \$2,600 (\$4,950 budgeted). Total expenses were \$454,846, which was 4% below FY25 budget leaving an operating budget deficit of \$19,474 (\$30,986 operating deficit anticipated in FY25 budget). The operating deficit was mitigated by security and historical grant funds (\$31,290) received in FY25 for expenses incurred in FY24 resulting in a net surplus of \$6,665 for the operating budget + non-budgeted income/expenses.

Major capital investments in our building funded by the endowment during FY25 included \$29,825 for roof repairs and \$29,430 for chancel lighting. FY26 budget (2025-2026). Similar to the FY25 budget, the approved FY26 budget relies on one-time income resources including use of our remaining \$10,369 COVID paycheck protection program funds and \$26,000 from prior years' budget surplus. The FY26 budget income includes \$325,000 in annual stewardship pledges and doubling of rental income to \$32,000 with a net deficit of \$6,580. Pledge income as of September 14 was \$115,723 from 74 of 100 pledge units (36% of FY26 \$322,000 pledge total) compared with \$102,027 as of September 1, 2024 in FY25.

3. Spirit Life Council Report ~ Michael Michaud

Worship Associates

(August) As is our tradition, we skipped the July meeting and reconvened in August. We welcomed three new WAs: Deana David, Melissa Gatica and Carl Shields; and welcomed our new DOM, Meredith. All new WAs have completed mentoring and have one remaining group orientation session with Michael Michaud and Sue Smolski (October). WAs met in early September (2nd Thursday of each month). Our pulpit is filled through the remainder of this year (up to and including, December 28, 2025).

Music Ministries

Meredith attended the WA September meeting and gave a significant presentation on the *DOM Role and Vision*. The most important piece of clarifying information for the WAs is that the WA and minister/pulpit guest will correspond with Meredith on music, not the accompanists. Put more succinctly "all communication on music is through Meredith." This approach should make communication around music more efficient.

Five of our WAs have joined the choir! Meredith conducted two Thursday evening rehearsals prior to *Ingathering* with the USH Choir and, AMAZINGLY, 30 individuals sang in the choir for the service on September 14. The refurbishment of our sanctuary piano was completed just in time for the September 11 choir rehearsal. Georgi Lekof was the accompanist for this service and will be our regular accompanist when our choir is present. We are fortunate to have an accompanist of this caliber (take a moment to read his bio).

Benjamin Mabrey (fortunate to have Benjamin as well) will also be a regular pianist, mostly on the non-choir Sundays. Ben will continue to sing periodically as needed, as a bass, with the Schola Singers and choir as well.

I had the joy of serving as coordinator of the music program from June 15 through August 31, and the baton has been passed to its rightful place. Meredith has performed capably and learned quite quickly the vision and role of DOM. She appears to be outpacing expectations. She assisted with the music for *Sound Meditation and Sacred Chanting* on August 10 and had visible roles in leading the congregation throughout the latter half of August.

Meredith collaborated with Rev. Bob and me for *Ingathering*, but selected and executed all the music for *Ingathering*. She also reached out to Greig Shearer to add the flute to a number of pieces for this service. Meredith and I have been meeting every Thursday to enhance coordination. The USH Schola returned for the September 21 service with Rev. Jan Carlson. The music selections blended nicely with the theme and were performed beautifully (in four-part harmonies for all the hymns—including *Spirit of Life*—and anthems).

Meredith has meaningfully expanded the use of the *Online Worship Calendar*, and is using it effectively for planning and coordinating. She has added a column for each: prelude, offertory, postlude and hymns. The spreadsheet is a wonderful planning and tracking document that is now even more robust.

Worship Attendance

Worship attendance was great for the summer (see attached spreadsheet). For the services in FH, one service had as many as 116 in person congregants (129 total). The lowest in person attendance was 72 (84 total), as we hit peak summer vacation season. These numbers are appreciably higher than all the summers since the pandemic. *Ingathering* marked a great return to upstairs with 127 in person congregants (total of 146). This turned out to be our highest attendance other than the National Register service since the pandemic.

Religious Education

I defer to Nina, Virginia and/or Rev. Bob to report out on the hard work each of them has been doing with Shahan over the past several months.

4. Social Justice Report ~ Judy Sullivan

Good Neighbor Offering totals: 2024/25

September	\$1,222.40	REACH Fund of CT
October	1,400.50	Hawkwine
November	1,500.40	Horace Bushnell Children's Food Pantry
December	2,488.50	IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services)
January	1,374.10	Operation Fuel
February	1,664.10	Brother Carl Hardrick Institute
March	2,328.91	Center for Children's Advocacy
April	1,413.20	South Park Inn
May	1,350.27	Church Street Eats
June	1,713.10	Interval House

Although the GNO does not continue during the summer, we do participate in the special fundraiser held by our neighbor, The Village for Families and Children. For many years we have helped to raise money for their back-to-school uniform fund during the months of July and August. This year USH donated \$3,471.32.

Immigration Organizing

- Interfaith Family Support Ministry: working with CT Students for a Dream (C4D) and attorney Glenn Formica. They are expecting "a tsunami of ICE detentions after October 1." That is when the \$170 billion authorized in the OBBBA becomes available.
- Hartford Deportation Defense: accompaniment and Red Folder training
- One Million Rising: Indivisible CT organizing Avelo protests, ICE rallies, legislative actions

Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA)

USH has volunteered our venue for several monthly All Teams meetings; the first was Wednesday, Sept 17. These are planning and review sessions for the upcoming House Meetings that will take place this fall in multiple congregational locations.

5. Building & Grounds Update ~ David Newton

Music Room Carpet Installation

It was generally agreed, so it seems, by everyone concerned that new carpet be installed in the Music Room, what with a new employee and new arrangement prevailing. Just to make the record official:

We have a current estimate which is accepted in the amount of \$4,299.08. Kindly pass this Board Resolution: Resolved, the Music Room shall be cleaned up and in the process, there shall be new carpet installed and related work to be accounted for as a capital project not to exceed \$4,500. This was passed by the Board at its meeting of 9/22/25

Move to amend the Resolution Concerning Addition of Heat Pump for Climate Control in the Library, David and Servetus was passed by the Board on 14 August as follows:

- ~ Delete Wording: ~~not to exceed \$62,000~~
- ~ Replace amendment: not to exceed \$64,000

Discussion: There was some confusion about inclusion of the specialized hydro thermostatic controls that turned out to be required for the pre-approved rebate. At our request, the vendor honored the original quote for the job at \$58,900 leaving the option to us to include the alternate, and more expensive, hydro thermostatic control equipment and installation necessary for the rebate. This item has been added at our request at a cost of \$4,700. The preapproved rebate remains at \$7,500. Accordingly, the phrase setting the, not to exceed amount, has been increased.

The reason this matter has been approved promptly (before Board Approval) was to ensure accuracy in the pending building permit, should it be checked by the rebate folks. This significant resolution amendment, a kind of technical change for such a project, will be helpful for subsequent audits of USH finances.

Motion to Amend passed at Board meeting 09/22/