

The Unitarian Universalist Church
Rockford, Illinois



Annual Report 2025—2026

The Unitarian Universalist Church

2025-26 Annual Report

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Officers of the Congregation

2025-2026

President: Wendy Bennett
Treasurer: Bob Spelman

Vice President: Diane Kuehl
Clerk: Scott Garwick

Board of Trustees

Kendra Asbury

Neita Webster

Clark Logemann

Committee Chairs & Team Leaders

BUILDING & GROUNDS Dave Schubert
LIBRARY TEAM..... Mike Ullrich
FINANCE COMMITTEE..... Steve Lewis
Investment Panel..... Teresa Wilmot
Memorials & Special Gifts..... Pat Lewis
Generosity Committee..... Sandi Campbell and company
DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE..... Teresa Wilmot
MEMBERSHIP TEAM..... Rev. Joyce Palmer
RELIGIOUS GROWTH & LEARNING..... Lindsay Trank, DRE
FAITH AND ACTION TEAM..... Rev. Joyce Palmer
WORSHIP TEAM..... Rev. Bret Lortie
Music Team..... Tim Anderson, Music Director
CARING TEAM..... Rich McKnight
NOMINATING PANEL..... Renee Mealey

Staff

Co-Minister for Congregational Life The Rev. Joyce Palmer
Co-Minister for Interim Transformational Ministries..... The Rev. Bret Lortie
DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION Lindsay Trank
MUSIC DIRECTOR Dr. Tim Anderson
OFFICE MANAGER Autumn Powell
MINISTER EMERITUS..... The Rev. David R. Weissbard
MUSIC DIRECTOR EMERITA..... Kay Hotchkiss

President's Report 2025 - 2026

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your Board President along side Board members Diane Kuehl, Scott Garwick, Bob Spelman, Neita Webster, Clark Logemann and Kendra Asbury. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the invaluable support of past Board members Matt Menze and Kim Lowman-Vollmer along with Finance chair, Steve Lewis for their expertise and support this year. Every one of these dedicated Church members shared their knowledge and insights to help keep our Church moving forward during a challenging year.

What a year this has been! Not 10 minutes after the conclusion of our last Annual Meeting in June of 2025, our beloved minister, Matthew Johnson, told us he was leaving in August to take a position with the Midwest District of the UUA. I was so relieved to find a Board of Directors—both incoming and outgoing members—able to rise to the challenge.

What became immediately apparent was this: we were outside the traditional time to recruit an interim minister. General Assembly was fast approaching and the Board needed to act quickly. GA was an ideal opportunity to recruit potential interims. An Interim Search Team was appointed by the Board. Matt Menze, Diane Kuehl, Kendra Asbury and I jumped into action. The UUA and Midwest District staff were invaluable as we completed what we lovingly called the on line 'dating' profile for our Church just as GA got underway at the end of June.

While all this was going on, our digital projector used during Sunday worship died. Our budget did not anticipate the loss of this expensive, critical worship tool. A fundraising campaign was launched to pay for this crucial piece of equipment. Meetings were held, experts were consulted, money was raised and, as you can see, a new system was installed and funded by your generous support.

During this frantic Summer of crisis and change, the search for an interim minister reached an amazing conclusion. Rev. Bret Lortie expressed his interest in being OUR interim minister. The Interim Search Team read his application, listened to his past sermons, talked to his references and by mid-August we knew he was a gem. Rev. Bret, apparently, liked us too!

One little glitch; Rev. Bret was not able to work for us full time. His plan was to commute from Madison, WI on a part time basis. So, there was still work to do. We had been a Church used to 1.5 ministers, and 2 half time ministers wasn't sufficient.

Rev. Joyce Palmer, our wonderful part time assistant minister stepped up to fill the gap. Rev. Joyce stepped out of her comfort zone. She agreed to preach one week a month in addition to her other duties. We hired a part time office assistant for Rev. Joyce and R.E. Director Lindsay to help with administrative tasks. While this arrangement seemed acceptable, several months into this year a new and novel arrangement was proposed.

Co-ministry is a growing trend in the UUA. This Winter, Rev. Bret and Rev. Joyce presented just such an arrangement to the Board. We embraced it. Each of them is now working 3/4 time. Each minister is responsible for specific, designated roles. They each report to the Board. They make an awesome team!

In August, 2025 the Church organized a beautiful farewell for Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson. The entire community turned out to wish him well in his new position. (My favorite memory from the event was Rockford Mayor Tom MacNamara helping out by carrying a case of beer into the party!) It was not easy to say

goodbye to a person who meant so much to us for 17 years, but we recognize that all good things come to an end. Matthew's departure is an opportunity for our Church Community to step up and grow. As we all got to know Rev. Bret, he has worked hard to get to know and understand us. More than that, he has spent much of this year guiding us out of crisis mode and into see ourselves more clearly. Who are we? What do we love? Who do we want to become?

This Spring our Nominating Panel asked us just these questions. Nominating panel members Renee Mealey, Rich McKnight, Spitty Tata, Katie Conrad and Matt Menze along with the Board personally reached out to every family in this Church. The question? Who should help us choose our next minister? The team YOU chose is an amazing collection of wisdom, dedication, and youth. Lia Gima, Andy Larson, Rebecca Beneditz, Dave Black and Billie Callahan are embracing this challenge. I cannot wait to see where the future takes us.

My past two years on the Board, this year as your President, has reminded me why I am UU. We are people strongly rooted in love—for ourselves, this Church, and this community. We rise up to challenges. We are willing to change. We look for the best in one another. We honor 'so great a cloud of witnesses' who for 175 years have been the face of liberal religion. We are forward facing, embracing the challenge of keeping that light burning.

Board President,
Wendy Bennett

Mission Vision Ends

Vision:

A loving, spiritual congregation that lives our values through belonging, reason, and action.

Mission:

Like the nature that surrounds us, we evolve as a habitat for spiritual development.

- Our deep roots connect us to a wealth of resources that nourish our growth as a beacon for justice, inclusion, and liberation, especially anti-racism and gender and sexuality justice.
- Our listening cultivates diverse and multicultural relationships that bridge divisions, strengthen our communities, heal hearts, and foster safety for all.
- Our awareness of our interdependence inspires us to protect the shared environment and natural world in which we live.

Ends and Strategies

1. Our members grow in belonging by embodying our values and connecting with our spiritual lives.

Another way of putting this end is "I AM UU" or "WE ARE UU."

1A: Faith formation for all ages.

We use programs and resources that help people grow in Unitarian Universalist identity, faith, values, and active living.

1A1: Sustainable and Reliable Volunteers for Children’s Religious Education. We have regular people who volunteer, forming relationships, nurturing UU identity, and sustaining a strong multi-generational ministry. By October 2025, we will have at least 3 regular people for an RE team and at least 20 1x/month teachers. These numbers are sustained with new folks joining as others rotate off. In addition to recruiting new folks, we thank and support our existing volunteers. In addition, a new nursery caregiver with OWL and admin responsibilities will support this program. Responsible: DRE, with assistance from RE team to recruit. Cost: Zero for volunteers; a stipend of 6K for a nursery/OWL teacher to make this work. Timeline: Oct. 2025 and ongoing.

1A2: UU Identity Development for All Ages. In Religious Education for Children and for Adults, and in worship and music, we focus on providing opportunities, programs, curricula, and resources that grow a sense of UU identity, commitment to the values centered in love, and how to live as a UU in daily life.

For Children’s RE, the DRE selects programs, trains teachers, and assess success. Throughout the 25-26 year, she looks for programs that focus on UU identity, pilots them, and implements, with continuous improvement, from fall of 26 onward. No additional resources needed.

For Adult RE, the ministers select and develop programs. The Senior Minister will create and lead a 7-week “UU values and living” program in the spring of ‘26. The Assistant Minister will ensure that Wonderful Wednesday programs connect with UU identity. No additional cost.

For Worship and Music, the Senior Minister, Music Director, and Worship Associates will ensure regular focus on UU identity, values, and resources in their selections, themes, and messages. This will begin with the 25-26 worship year. No additional cost.

1A3: Soul Matters. We will use Soul Matters materials for small groups, worship, religious education, and outreach consistently and effectively. We will encourage more people to participate in Soul Matters Groups. Each current group will have 8+ people, and at least one new group will be started each year, in the fall of ‘25, ‘26, and ‘27. Responsible: Assistant Minister and Soul Matters Facilitators. Cost: No additional.

1B. Caring, Membership, and Belonging

We strengthen our ministries of caring and membership in ways that promote inclusive, meaningful, and authentic belonging and community.

1B1: Develop and sustain “Belonging and Membership” team. As part of the “Caring and Membership Team”, and co-led by the Assistant Minister and lay leaders, the Belonging and Membership team will help welcome and integrate new members, promote belonging and engagement, and build community and connection. The team will be fully operational by fall ‘25 and sustained through the years to come. No additional cost, the professional expenses to consult with AUUMP (Association of UU Membership Professionals) can be used here.

1B2: Develop and sustain a “Pastoral Care Associates” program. In addition to the existing Caring Team’s work to provide rides, meals, cards, and other caring ministry, we’ll restart a Pastoral Care Associates program where a select group of lay folks will provide lay pastoral ministry, focused on listening and affirming. Led by the Assistant Minister and Caring Team. Beginning recruitment and training in 25-26, with the team operational by May of ‘26.

1C. Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Oppression, and Belonging

Our community practices inclusion, pluralism, love, justice, and anti-oppression. We widen the circle of belonging and people – especially younger people, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and LGBTQIA+ people –so all feel we/they belong in this community.

1C1: We deepen our cultural work on anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism, with a focus on communication, membership, and becoming aware of subtle forms of white supremacy culture. We follow up on the Change Team report and work with coaches and trainers to do this work together. Multiple trainings, conversations, and experiences are offered each year. The Board, in alignment with the Racial and Economic Justice team, and support from the ministers, holds this responsibility. Cost - up to \$1000/year for trainers/programs, from the REJ or Leadership Development budget lines. Timeline: at least two events/programs in 25-26, and at least three in 26-27 and 27-28. At least 15% of the congregation (60 people) participate in these programs. Redo the matrix in spring 27 to assess progress and next steps.

1C2: Start and sustain a DRUUMM Chapter. Working with UUANI (Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois) and DRUUMM (Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries), we will start and sustain a DRUUMM Chapter for BIPOC members and friends. The Assistant Minister, with support from the Senior Minister, will recruit a “catalyst”(s) for this. Cost: \$500 a year in stipend (DRUUMM adds funds). Timeline: Summer 2025 recruitment, begin in fall ‘25, and ongoing after that.

1C3: Sustain and grow the UU 20/30 group. Support the facilitators and recruit more members and friends in their 20s and 30s to participate in this program. Retain existing participants. Goal is to have

10 regular participants by March ‘26, and 15 by March of ‘27. Responsible: Facilitators and Assistant Minister. Cost: No additional.

1C4: Worship and Music that widens the circle of belonging. We will intentionally include worship resources, including music, ritual, and texts, which resonate with wider circles of people. In particular, we will focus on diversity of race, ethnicity, and age/generation in the materials we select, examples we use, and programs we plan. Responsible: The ministers, Music Director, and worship team. Timeline: beginning with planning in Spring ‘25, and really ramping up in fall of ‘25. Do an assessment, perhaps with an outside consultant, in the 26-27 year. Cost: Up to \$1000 for the consultant, other costs in the existing budget, though we may need to increase the guest musician budget beginning in ‘26-27’ by at least \$1000.

1C5: Justice and inclusion for LGBTQAI+ people. We grow as a community of many genders and sexualities and we grow in our practice of genuine inclusion and solidarity. Folks expand their understanding and skill at welcoming, we celebrate our diversity, promote community, and act in solidarity. Training Sessions and inclusive language and practices are the norm. Responsible: The Sex and Gender Justice Team, the Ministers, and the Membership and Belonging Team. Cost: No additional. Timeline: ongoing.

1D: Generosity

We embody our UU value of generosity.

1D1: We have a strong annual campaign. Over the next three years, a) every member receives at least one one-on-one stewardship visit, and b) our average giving gets within \$15/month of the UUA average (currently \$25 below). Responsible: The Senior Minister, Office Manager, Finance Committee, Board, and Generosity Team. The finance team holds prime responsibility. Cost: nothing additional unless we decide to work with Stewardship for Us to support this, cost tbd. Timeline: Will recruit at least 15 stewards by Jan ‘26 for a three-

year term. Will divide the congregation in 1/3rds and do one-to-one visits with that 1/3 and selected others. The other 2/3rd will get emails, etc. Repeat in '27 and '28 with the other 1/3rds, while adding new folks.

1D2: We will regularly volunteer. Create and implement volunteer plan after a thorough audit of current members, volunteers, and volunteer opportunities. Opportunities to volunteer will be made clear, and we'll create easy-on-ramps to participate, and thank volunteers often to encourage more service. Responsible: Board and Staff. Timeline: A volunteer plan will be created in fall '25 and implemented. Cost: minimal, for a party and/or thank you gifts.

1D3: Leadership Development. We will spend time on intentional leadership development and onboarding, as well as continuing the Roundtable of team and committee leaders. The ministers will offer leadership development experiences and share opportunities through the MidAmerica region for leadership growth. Ensure annual board retreat to determine intentional leadership development and onboarding plans for the upcoming fiscal year. The Leadership Roundtable will identify leadership needs. A team-leader and committee-leader's orientation will happen yearly. Responsible: Board, Leadership Roundtable, and Senior Minister. Cost: existing for retreat facilitator.

2. Our members widen the circle of belonging and advance justice and equity by practicing right relationships with our neighbors.

Another way of putting this is "WE SHOW UP AS UUs." 2A: We are accountable and effective coalition partners.

2A1: Our Faith in Action (FiA) teams receive increasingly robust support and participation. Members join in the activities of the teams and volunteer for events with partners in larger numbers (at least 60 unique participants). The FiA teams receive staff support and have regular, sustainable, programs.

Note we are not asking the FiA teams to do more – but for the congregation to join in what they are doing. Responsible: The congregation, with support from FiA teams. Timeline: ongoing. Cost: existing.

2A2: UUANI Partnership and GRACE Training. We nurture our covenant with UUANI (Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois) and other Illinois UU congregations, providing a liaison to the statewide Action Council of congregations and supporting their actions of the week. FiA leaders and others participate in their GRACE training for justice leader (at least 2 per cycle). We raise money for UUANI. Responsible: Faith in Action Core team and Senior Minister. Cost: Existing FiA budgets. Timeline: Ongoing, with at least 1 UUANI focus Sunday per year.

2A3: We continue to use our building and resources to support our partners. We open our building to partners at low or no cost, we advertise their events, and offer our support, expertise, and connections to our key partners. We are of service and they can count on us. Responsible: Office Manager, Senior Minister, and Faith in Action Teams. Cost: no additional (some opportunity cost from lower rent). Timeline: ongoing.

2B: We Show Up as UUs We live out our values in our lives as a congregation and as Unitarian Universalists, proudly claiming our identity with respect for the pluralist world we share with our neighbors.

2B1: We identify ourselves. We make it easy for folks who choose to do so to identify themselves as Unitarian Universalists out in the world. We run programs so folks can order clothing, stickers, and other materials that can be displayed at and beyond events. We use local and ethical businesses and sources for these materials. In addition to witnessing to our values, the materials can be shared with others to invite them to explore the church. Branding and messaging is relatable to the wider public. Responsible: Office

Manager, with support from staff and Membership and Belonging Team. Cost: existing (minister's discretionary fund to pay for items for those who cannot afford to buy their own).

Timeline: starting with Homecoming '25 and ongoing.

2B2: We communicate opportunities to show up, and show up together. We curate the many opportunities from our partners and others, and find ways folks can gather and/or travel together to events and have formal or informal UU presence. The Office Manager, Senior Minister, and Faith in

Action leaders develop a plan to do this in the fall of '25 and implement in Jan. '26, with improvements going forward. Cost: existing.

2B3: We do our work in faith, grounded in our values, and with respect. We train, teach, practice, and preach about how to do our justice work in ways that are faithful and inclusive. We use materials from the UUA's Side with Love campaign to improve our skills. See also 1C1. Responsible: Ministers, Faith in Action Teams.

Timeline: Ongoing. Cost: Existing.

2B4: We celebrate how we show up - in many ways. We "shine our light" and provide exemplars and examples by naming the ways we show up. We celebrate folks who live our values. This includes diverse ways – activism, parenting, professional, service, witness, kindness, and much more. We recognize that many ways are needed and valued and name these. Responsible: Ministers, Board of Trustees. Cost: existing. Timeline: ongoing.

3. Our members are transformed by our interdependent relationship with our planet, the universe, the web of life – the sacred as we understand it.

Another way of putting this is "WE ARE INTERWOVEN" or "WE ARE CHANGED BY CONNECTING"

3A. As a congregation, we care for the earth. We take collective action to repair, nurture, and be responsible citizens of planet earth.

3A1. We care for the land upon which we sit. We nurture, heal, restore, and help our 10 acres of land thrive. The Eco-Justice Team and the Building and Grounds team remove invasive species, nurture the prairie, work to reduce our carbon footprint, and make connections with our neighbors who share these woods. Timeline: ongoing. Cost: Add \$1000 each year to the grounds budget beginning in '26 for professional support in Buckthorn removal and other measures. Add'l: Building and Grounds continues to assess opportunities to reduce energy use, and schedules needed projects. Cost: from capital maintenance reserves. Timeline: yearly by May of each year, a plan for the coming year.

3A2: We use our funds in ecologically responsible ways. We continue to invest our legacy funds in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) funds, and seek to improve the sustainability of our regular spending. Responsible: Finance Team and Endowment Panel, and office manager. Timeline: Ongoing. Cost: no additional.

3A3: The congregation engages in eco-justice work. At least 4 dozen people in the congregation regularly participate in the programs, events, and meetings of the eco-justice team and its partners. Responsible: Congregation and Eco-Justice team. Cost: no additional. Ongoing.

3B: Our members are good stewards and citizens of planet Earth in their individual lives. 3B1: Members are inspired and equipped to live eco-just lives. With respect for the context of different lives, folks make choices that are more sustainable and just and promote relationships. The ministers and eco-justice team provide useful tools and connections for folks to do this, and there is a spirit of engagement on these issues. Timeline: ongoing. Measured with an annual survey. Cost: no additional.

3B2: We are a hub of action for eco-justice and relationships. Community organizations and projects share their events with us, we host events, and folks know they can connect here with their longing to be in healthy relationships with the web of life. Responsible: Eco-Justice Team, Office Manager for communications and building events. Cost: none. Timeline: ongoing.

3C: We cultivate awe, wonder, and an ethic of care for the interdependent web of life.

3C1: In worship, music, and faith formation we encourage, invite, and inspire connection and healthy relationships with the earth and all life. We provoke, heal, and inform folks in ways that lead to more hope, action, and sustainability. Responsible: ministers, music director, DRE, and eco-justice team. Cost: no additional. Timeline: ongoing.

3C2: We support the Woodsong School. The Woodsong Nature Preschool has as its core mission to nurture this connection with nature in healthy ways. The Board and Minister continue to support this program as core to our mission, and the Building and Grounds team provides needed support as well. Cost: included in tuition. Ongoing.

Staff Reports

Co-Minister for Interim Transformational Ministries

TRANSITIONAL TASKS

This fall and winter we engaged four of the five tasks for interim ministry:

- The “History Task” is where we review where we've been and how we got where we are. To this end we held a startup workshop, created a living history timeline on a Deale Hall bulletin board, and incorporated themes from our history in Kairos articles and worship.
- The “Identity Task” is where we explore our stories and listen to each other. We accomplished this by gathering in listening circles and sharing our personal stories about how the congregation has been a part of our lives, and how we've contributed. Fifty members participated and a "last chance listening circle is scheduled for June 14th after service. We will conclude this transitional identity work in a Town Hall meeting this fall.
- The “Leadership Task” is where we look at structures of governance and organization. There has been lots of great work in this area, from finishing a complete revision of our committee/team charters to reconvening the Congregational Life Council. Our first meeting of the Council was full of energy and insights. Something we identified early in the fall was the strength of your previous minister's leadership style. This, as well as impacts from the pandemic, invites us now to strengthen lay involvement and autonomy. Key areas on which we've focused so far have been revitalizing the Committee on Ministry (aka the Transition Team), which has met monthly; the Worship Team, which plans to re-start lay led services; and appointing Religious Education and Music lay leaders. Other areas of lay empowerment have not needed revitalization. For example, the effectiveness of our justice, hospitality, and caring committees are a testament to the able leadership of Rev. Joyce and the dedication of members. The pantry is another great example of a ministry where the congregation has taken “extreme ownership.”
- The “Denomination Task” is where we examine where and how we are connected to other UUs. In this area you are doing well. You value your connections with the UUA and are in good relationship with our association. There is a balance to be struck for UU congregations between independence and connection, between accountability and freedom, between honoring our long tradition of progressive religion and new opportunities in our community. We do well balancing these tensions.
- The “Vision for the Future Task”(for next church year) is where we will look to where we want to be in five, ten, twenty years and beyond. This, too, will be a part of the Town Hall meeting in the fall and further work next year. It's too early to say where this transitional task will take us, but I can't wait.

CO-MINISTRY MODEL

We have temporarily moved, for this and next church year, to a new model of ministry. Beginning last fall, we had some structural challenges. First, I live out of state which limits the number of days I can be in Rockford and how connected I can reasonably be with Winnebago County communities. Second, for personal reasons I am only working part time. We quickly realized that you, as a congregation used to a ministry of 1.5 FTE (full time equivalents) we needed more than two half-time ministers. Therefore, we came up with a plan to move Rev. Joyce and me to three-quarter time and to share, equally, the responsibilities and accountability formerly

assumed by the Senior Minister alone. Rev. Joyce and I have well-defined portfolios and report independently to the Board. Rev. Joyce has the lead for pastoral care, faith-in-action, membership, volunteer coordination, and small groups. I have the lead for the overall worship program, transitional tasks, board leadership engagement, and staff supervision.

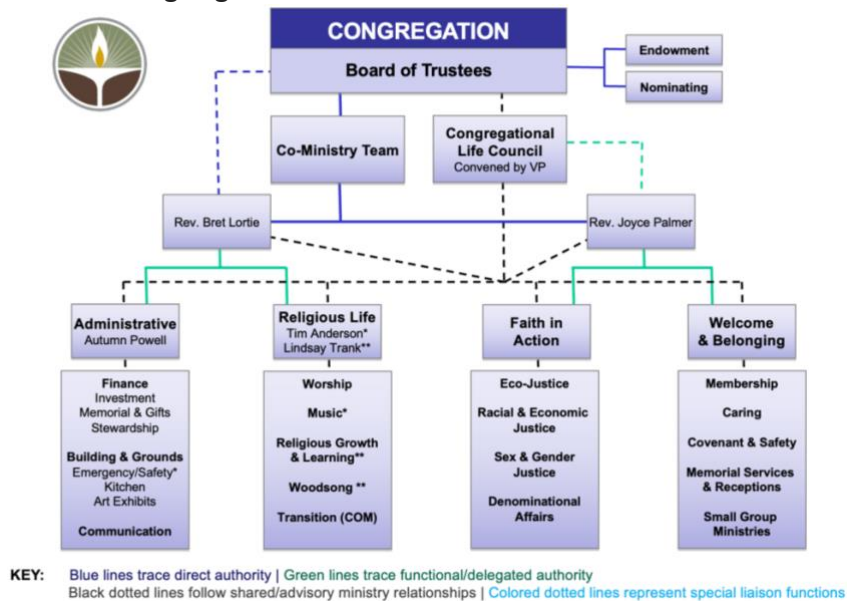
It is working incredibly well. I also want to stress that this is a 20-month temporary arrangement which will end in June of next year, 2027. At that time Rev. Joyce wishes to return to half-time per her previous arrangement.

How does this affect the search? Most likely the majority of applicants will be seeking a full-time, traditional Senior Minister position. I assume, because it's not yet written, that this is how your search package will present the position. However, because you now have some experience with co-ministry, you might also attract a co-ministry team (two ministers, usually married) who might share the position (1 FTE). It is perfectly acceptable for a congregation to be open to interviewing both Senior Minister and Co-Ministry candidates.

As the search committee polls the congregation regarding what traits you want for your next ministry, you will shape how they approach candidates.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

I've been asked to publish a working organizational chart.



ACCESSIBILITY: A CHALLENGE AHEAD

There is one area of growth I would really like to challenge the church to examine, and that is accessibility. I don't expect that during my time all potential projects can be finished. But conversations around accessibility goals should be happening in the coming church year. I know this has been an important topic for us in the past; my hope is it is just as important now. The ADA exempts churches from compliance. Schools, libraries, civic institutions, state and national parks, businesses: essentially all public buildings are required to comply with minimum accessibility requirements. These include doors that anyone can open on their own, and ramps for mobility. It is a failure of the social contract that churches are exempt from providing basic accommodations for everyone. While churches get a free pass from the ADA (primarily because conservative religious organizations claim it violates their religious values and autonomy), progressive religion values accessibility as a moral and ethical mandate. Now is the time to form a concrete and executable plan so it's ready for your new minister, who themselves may need accommodation, when they arrive.

Denominational involvement

Treasurer, UUMA Military Chaplain Chapter

Good Officer, UUMA Central Midwest Chapter

Accredited Interim Minister in Training, UUMA Transitional Ministers Chapter

Member, UU Spiritual Directors Network

Schedule

My position is three-quarter time which assumes: two monthly sermons; an additional Sunday leading guest worship; two weekly administrative days (in-person and remote) for meetings, calls, professional activities; and a day devoted to writing. I have attended most major congregational events, including the Chili Cookoff, Auction, Seder, and other activities. With reasonable notice, I am always available via phone or Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Bret Lortie, Co-Minister for Interim Transformational Ministries

Co-Minister of Congregational Life

This year has been a period of transition as our congregation prepares for the search for our next settled minister. To better reflect the realities of our shared workload and pastoral needs during this time, my title was shifted from Assistant Minister to Co-Minister. It has been a profound privilege to serve this community, offering continuity, spiritual grounding, and collaborative leadership as we work together to grow and deepen our connections as a community.

Key Areas of Responsibility & Service

Worship

This year, I led worship once a month, building on the Soul Matters theme of the month and offering what I hope was inspiration and support to the congregation. I also assisted with other worship during the year working alongside guest speakers and lay leaders.

Caring Team

We have a caring and dedicated team of volunteers who anchor our congregational care network, providing support to members experiencing grief, illness, and life transitions. The team provided meals, visits, and transportation to help maintain connection and offer support. Our Memorial Subcommittee offers a steady presence and tangible support in the assistance they provide families.

Welcoming and Belonging

We oversaw the pathways to growth and membership, ensuring that newcomers felt a warm, authentic Unitarian Universalist welcome from their very first visit. There were three Getting to Know UU sessions this year and two Starting Point programs for newcomers and current members. We welcomed 16 people into membership this year.

We focused on integrating new friends and members into the active life of the church, helping individuals find their unique places of connection and service.

Adult Program

Supported and facilitated adult spiritual development programs on the UU Common Read, Creating Home Altars, introduced and facilitated a well-received *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading) evening, adapting this contemplative practice for a Unitarian Universalist context using diverse spiritual texts and poetry. Supported the Wonderful Wednesday programs developed by the Faith and Action Teams.

Hosted Bad Faith presentation with Lil Baddour, newcomer to our congregation. The event focused on addressing the influence of Christian Nationalism on civic life, democracy, and pluralistic ideals. Our Guest Speaker, Dr. Andrew Ward is a family friend of Lil and professor at Tulane University. We had 151 people in attendance and over 400 views on YouTube. The Racial and Economic Justice Team are working on continuing the conversation in our local community.

Small Group Ministry:

Continued our small group structures to ensure adults had consistent spaces to process the changing dynamics of our church and the world. We have many thriving small groups, Soul Matters, UUs at Wesley Willows, Non-violent Communication Practice Group, UU2030s Young Adults, Widow Support, Sunday Morning Meditation and new groups forming. Special thanks to the leaders of the meditation group for committing to lead this every Sunday. The consistency has had a positive impact on the attendance and reach of this group.

Faith and Action Organizing Team

Convened twice this year with the Faith and Action Organizing Team, co-leaders of the Faith and Action Teams, to offer a space of spiritual grounding, collaborative coordination, and strategic problem-solving. We discussed the importance of building a succession plan designed to prevent burnout and intentionally grow new leadership.

Looking Ahead

As we look toward the coming church year and the upcoming ministerial search, my focus remains on keeping our foundations strong, our hearts open, and our spirits ready for the future. I am deeply grateful for the trust this congregation has placed in me as your Co-Minister, and I look forward to the journey ahead.

In Faith and Community,

Rev. Joyce Palmer

Co-Minister of Congregational Life

Director of Religious Education Annual Report

Religious Education

Our Religious Education program continues to thrive! We structure our Religious Education programming around the Soul Matters themes that are also used for worship and small groups. Children and youth are divided into three age ranges: K & Under, Grade 1- 6, and Grade 7-12 (youth group) with one staff person or two volunteers per group. Religious Educators provide developmentally appropriate, theme based activities for the children and youth in attendance. The Grade K & Under group focuses on UU values. The Grade 1-6 group focuses on the theme of the month and how it relates to Unitarian Universalism and the children's own lives. The youth group explored the Coming of Age and A Place of Wholeness curriculum in which they explored UU identity. Additionally, Billie Callahan, Kate Larson, and Julie Parks facilitated the Our Whole Lives curriculum for youth in grade 7-9 on the first and third Sundays after service from October through May.

Finally, I coordinated with our ministers to select and read the story for all ages throughout the year, offer a backpack blessing and child dedication, put on the Christmas pageant, welcome new members to the congregation, and engage in long range planning for the Religious Education program to align with our mission, vision, and strategic plan.

Woodsong Nature School

This year we have continued to offer programming 5 mornings per week, which allows parents to choose from 2, 3, or 5 days per week. We are fully enrolled for the summer 2026 session and the 2026-27 school year with a wait list. Beginning in September, we will offer a four day option only that runs Monday through Thursday. Word of mouth continues to be the most effective means of marketing.

We are seeing a number of Woodsong families visit church on Sundays, as well as existing church members sending their children to Woodsong. We have a great relationship with Spectrum School, and many families with more than one child take advantage of the opportunity to have all their children go to school in the same building.

We underwent our annual renewal of our DCFS license. We have recruited more substitute teachers to ensure that we have a roster of qualified subs to fill in during sick days and vacation time.

We continue to provide the quality experience that the community has come to know Woodsong for and the children and parents had a great school year.

In Gratitude

We would like to thank the following people for their time and commitment to volunteering: Rebecca Beneditz, Art Beneditz, Peggy Menze, Kim Lowman Vollmer, Lisa Volkman, Katy Conrad, Sandi Campbell, Rose Kruchten, Spitty Tata, Aisha Moe-Lindvall, Billie Callahan, Kate Larson, Julie Parks, Kendra Asbury, Verónica Soria Martinez, and Rev. Joyce Palmer.

Respectfully Submitted by Lindsay Trank

Music Director's Report

It is a joy to report that seating is tight in the choir loft on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings. Several new singers have joined the **Unicantors**, and it has been a delight to welcome them. We have a lot of fun, but we also work hard, and it shows. The level of quality of music in worship remains high, both in terms of presentation and in terms of selection. Music continues to be an integral part of what happens each week in worship, thanks to the collaboration and careful planning of our program staff and the dedication and commitment of our volunteer singers and musicians.

The Unicantors and several musical guests presented two major works in worship this program year. In December, *Solstice Trilogy*, a musical setting by UU composer Clif Hardin of lovely texts by UU lyricist Jan Elicker, conveyed the imagery and feeling of the winter solstice and its message of hope in times of darkness, aligning nicely with our December worship theme of choosing hope. We were happy to invite soprano soloist **Stephanie Souza Rasmann** and pianist **Trish Rooney** to join us in presenting this new work for you in worship. It was personally a pleasure for me to showcase music by Clif and Jan, who have been colleagues and friends of mine for many years. One of the movements of the work appeared in one of the repertoire sessions at the AUUMM conference last year in Atlanta. I had been looking unsuccessfully for a solstice piece, and I was so pleased to discover *Solstice Trilogy* and tell Clif and Jan, who were also at the conference, that their piece was exactly what I was hoping to find for our December Music Sunday.

In May, we presented what was certainly one of the most difficult works we have taken on in many years, a new composition by Alex Berko called *Sacred Place*. Everyone worked very hard in preparation for the piece, and their work truly paid off as it all came together beautifully in worship. *Sacred Place* is an extended work incorporating elements from Jewish liturgy and texts from Wendell Berry, John Muir, William Stafford, Rabindranath Tagore, and Hebrew scripture. As set musically by Berko, these texts invite listeners to consider our relation to the environment in communal terms. Opening and closing with prayer, this work creates a sacred sonic space in which we find a call to stand with and protect the natural world, an exhortation to listen to what that world has to tell us, a plea for healing for the harms it has suffered, and a kaddish to mourn that which has been lost. In alignment with our worship theme for May, the piece served well to awaken our curiosity about our responsibilities toward our world. Many musical friends joined us in presenting this moving work. Our guest soloists were **Stephanie Souza Rasmann**, **Mary Shore**, and **Joe Sweeney**. Our own **Clark Logemann** was the bass soloist. Our other musical guests were soprano **Margo Stedman**, violinist **Rachel Handlin**, and pianist **Trish Rooney**. Our own cellist **Martha Dunegan** also joined us. The congregation responded enthusiastically, with many people noting how moved they were by the music and its message, a testament to the work and its ability to create a profound experience for listeners in the context of worship. We are most grateful again this year to **Robin Gausebeck** for her financial support, which made this large musical undertaking possible.

Several other guest musicians joined us throughout the year to provide music. In my absence, music for worship was provided by **Lisa Redd** and **Trinadora (Ron Holm and Janel Nelson)**. We also enjoyed the musical gifts of cellist **Martha Dunegan**, violist **Teresa Wilmot** and baritone **Mattsen Heller** in worship this program year.

A personal highlight for me was that we sang my hymn "A Just Peace" in worship in November. I wrote the hymn as the final project for "Religion, the Arts, and Social Change," one of four courses I completed through the Harvard University Extension School to obtain a graduate certificate in Religion and Society in May 2025. My hymn was selected for inclusion in the new virtual UU hymnal *Sing Out Love* published last year by the

UUA. While several UU colleagues had used the hymn in worship at their churches, this was the first time we sang it here.

Finally, I would be remiss not to note the passing of **Jesse Parker**, whose musical talents as both pianist and singer enriched all our lives for so many years. A kind soul and dear friend to so many, his humility while in possession of such amazing talent made it such a joy to work with him. We miss him greatly and are glad that **Libby Parker** continues to anchor the tenors in the back row each week. As is regularly said in the Jewish tradition, may Jesse's memory be for blessing.

I continue to be thankful to work for a church that holds music in high esteem and supports its music program. As we are in a period of transition, it hasn't always been easy this year, but I commit to strive as I have for the past twenty-two years to do my best to provide and program music that enriches the worship experience of the congregation. As always, I look forward to the music yet to come.

Respectfully submitted,
Tim Anderson
Music Director

Combined Treasurer's and Finance Committee Annual Report

The Finance Committee monitors the financial status of the church and helps to maintain its sound condition by its activities and recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

The Treasurer is the financial officer of the church and sits on the Board of Trustees as well as the Finance Committee and the Investment Committee.

Summary of activities during the current year:

- Reviewed the church's income and expenses monthly, as well as the status of the fundraising activities, service contracts, memorials, and other financial matters.
- As of April, the church finances for the year are in control. Again, as of April, our best projection of the year end in June is that we will end with a budget surplus this year. That will be welcome as we move into a year of search and transition costs.
- The Balance Sheet is healthy, with balances of \$118,000 in the Operating Fund checking account, and smaller balances in both the Deficit Reserve, and the Building Maintenance Reserve. The Legacy Funds have a balance of \$1,533,000. Kudos to Teresa Wilmot and the Investment Panel.
- The major building project, the replacement of the wood siding was completed. This is a \$300,000 project. The Congregation voted to tap into our Building Legacy Fund to pay for this project. Thanks to the generous estate bequests of several past members, and thanks to a healthy stock market, our Building Fund was healthy enough to responsibly afford to fund this major project.
- Our worship experience was improved by a significant upgrade in the quality of the sanctuary projector and screen. The \$37,000 cost was funded entirely by generous donations by church members, without impacting on the budget, or the reserve funds.
- Two transitions required a good amount of committee attention. The departure of Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson followed by the hiring of interim minister, Rev. Bret at less than full time, while increasing Rev. Joyce role and evolving them into a Co-Ministry required some budget and bookkeeping planning. Secondly, the transition to a new bookkeeper also required time and attention.
- It is a tribute to the generosity of church members that pledge income is meeting the budget and maintaining a robust church program.
- Alexis Simmons, Rebecca Beneditz, Teresa Palmeno, and Steve Lewis chaired a church auction that raised a much needed \$11,551.
- The committee started developing updated policies around purchasing authority and fiscal authority of committees and staff.
- With the minister, built a balanced annual budget for fiscal year 2026-2027.

Committee Members: Steve Lewis (Chair), Sue Molyneaux, Teresa Wilmot (Investment Panel Chair), Steve Blomgren, Bob Spelman (Treasurer), Pat Lewis (Chair Memorials & Special Gifts), Keith Kruchten, Dave Zinn, Matt Menze, Clark Logeman.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Lewis, Finance Chair and Bob Spelman, Treasurer

Balance Sheet				
		Jun-25		Apr-26
Assets				
	Operating Fund	61,047		118,346
	Memorials Fund	8,349		5,333
	Maintenance Reserve	171,945		3,901
	Deficit Reserve	32,839		32,839
	In / Out Special accounts	25,628		23,007
	Legacy Fund - Justice Outreach	180,884		164,666
	Legacy Fund - Building	1,048,419		954,418
	Legacy Fund - Church Program	454,934		414,145
	Total Assets (less Land & Bldg)	1,984,045		1,716,655
Income Statement				
		2025-26 Budget	Budget thru April	Actuals thru April
Income				
	Stewardship Pledges	370,000	308,333	321,510
	Woodsong Tuitions	119,100	99,250	100,400
	Spectrum & Rentals	49,200	41,000	41,000
	Share the Plate	32,000	26,667	25,236
	Allocations from Legacy Funds	77,000	77,000	77,000
	Other	21,250	19,708	18,869
	Total Incomes	668,550	571,958	584,015
Expenses				
	Salaries & Fringe Benefits	317,596	256,445	270,910
	Insurance	14,593	14,593	17,295
	Office Expense	23,900	19,913	27,607
	Building & Grounds	79,272	71,309	77,741
	UUA Dues	28,090	-	-
	Woodsong	104,118	83,765	81,952
	Activities, R.E., and Outreach	98,399	74,389	45,653
	Total Expenses	665,968	520,414	521,158

Committee Reports

U.U. Church Building & Grounds Committee

The 2025-2026 year was one of the most unusual years in the recent history of the U.U. Church.

While the usual routine maintenance and repair activities took place: furnace and A/C servicing, minor plumbing repairs, mowing, snow plowing, landscaping, and Prairie work, etc., the single most significant event was the replacement of the siding on the original building. This project was the most substantial expenditure and most expansive, in scope, since the Office / Classroom building addition in 2001-2002. The project involved the removal of all the existing siding battens and the refacing of 9,100 sq/ft of redwood siding, trimming around doors and windows, structural fastening repairs to the Northwest wall of the Sanctuary, and removal and replacement of the sub-sheeting of the North Sanctuary wall. Structural concrete repairs for the main structural concrete sections of the Sanctuary ceiling and other wall sections. The total project went from Summer to late Fall.

The total cost was \$305,000.00. It was through the financial expertise of the Finance Committee and the Treasurer, the courage and trust of the Board and Congregation that this project was approved and completed. The construction company, DPI Construction, was critical to the success of the project. The attention to details, skill of the work force, and the willingness to communicate issues to the church were invaluable.

There are two upcoming activities that will occur in the near future.

The repair, resurfacing, priming, painting of the Deale Hall and Narthex West windows and the re-sealing of all of these original West windows.

The installation of the Emergency Egress window ladders, in the lower-level classrooms: The Chapel, Rm's 8,9,10,11, & 18.

Items for the upcoming year: 1. Structural concrete repairs to the Kitchen balcony / Spectrum School vestibule entry, and sidewalk sections. 2. Other lower-level concrete repairs. 3. Parking lot resealing and restriping.

Committee Members: Jim Dehler, Clark Logemann, Allen Penticoff, Kim Vollmer. Committee Chair: DJ Schubert

Library Committee

Committee members are Mike Ullrich (chair), Jan Dunham, Rhea Overley, Charlie Bowman, and Kathy Young (secretary). Charlie Bowman joined the committee in January 2026.

The committee will have met nine times by the end of this fiscal year.
We meet the 4th Sunday of most months.

We sorted donated books to determine which ones were appropriate to keep in our library. We processed and shelved the books we decided to keep. We processed and shelved 8 donated books as of May 2026. We will have purchased 8 new books by the end of the fiscal year. Those books will also be processed and shelved.

There has been some discussion about starting a book club. A couple of book club meetings have been held, and the group is working out the best way to please the most readers.

Kathy Young, Secretary

Finance Committee Annual Report 2025– 2026

Please see the combined Treasure & Finance Report on page 19

Memorials and Special Gifts

Committee's purpose: To act as a sensitive liaison with families and/or donors in the selection of memorials that reflect the life and interests of the memorialized person(s) and are appropriate to the needs, priorities and décor of the church; and to review proposed donations to the church.

Summary of committee's activities during the year:

Our year has been a quiet one.

Committee activities this year included the following expenditure of memorial funds:

- Installation of 13 additional bricks with names added to the patio.
- Contribution of Memorial funds to restoration of Sanctuary hangings

Maintenance of the new patio remains an ongoing activity. Further brick engraving will take place when we have received enough requests to justify an order.

Committee members 2025- 2026: Francie Barnes, Mary Caskey, Jackie Dehler, Alice Enichen, Pat Lewis

Patricia Lewis, Chair

Investment Panel

Fund Allocations to 2026-2027 Operating Budget

Approval of the 2026-2027 Permanent Fund Income Allocations	Teresa Wilmot
Programs and Growth	\$ 21,100
Facility and Equipment	\$ 19,500
Capital Reserve*	\$ 29,000
Outreach (Justice) Fund	\$ 8,400
Total Allocations	\$ 7,000

- * In approving the allocation of these funds, the congregation authorizes the Board to approve expenditures of the Capital Maintenance Reserve Fund, upon the recommendation of the Building and Grounds and Finance Committees, without additional approval from the congregation.

This fiscal year, July 2025 to April 2026, our long-term funds rose slowly until April. The church's fund gained \$79,456, or 4.55% over the year. Both of our investments, those with the UUCEF fund through the UUA and mutual funds through Charles Schwab gains. Thirty-four percent of our total long-term investment is with UUCEF and 66% with Charles Schwab.

In February a major change was made to the investment products we use. The Panel decided to invest heavily in an index fund of the total stock market. This change reflects 2 characteristics of today's stock market; index funds tend to do slightly better than managed funds over time while incurring lower fees; and the "Magnificent 7" stocks represent about 35% of the S & P. Our socially responsible Calvert investments weren't taking advantage of these "stars." The "Magnificent 7" are Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla.

Our fund is balanced with bond investments, especially Treasury bonds, and the Calvert Bond fund is socially responsible. The UUCEF fund is socially responsible, includes a smaller investment in the "Magnificent 7" funds, and includes both equities and fixed income.

Members:

Teresa Wilmot, chair
Steve Blomgren
Steve Hall
Ed Kuehl
Steve Lewis
Sue Molyneaux
Bob Spelman

Submitted by Teresa Wilmot

Denominational Affairs Committee

Committee's Purpose: The Denominational Affairs Committee informs the congregation about the larger denomination--the MidAmerica Region and the UUA--and provides feedback from the congregation to the UUA.

Summary of Committee's Activities During 2025-2026:

Worked with the UUCEF, Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund, as the Chair of our Investment Panel.

Forwarded opportunities for training and cooperation between members and the MidAmerica Regional Staff.

Served as a delegate to General Assembly in Baltimore, in June, 2025, "Meet the Moment"

Selected a Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) for 2025 - 2028, "Abolition, Transformation, and Faith Formation," where "abolition refers to the elimination of the prison-industrial complex that treats people like slaves, replacing it with transformative justice and relational practices.

All three proposed AIW's (Action of Immediate Witness) passed:

"Defending LGBTQ Freedom Amid Funding Crisis: A Call for Global Solidarity"

"Faithful Defiance of Authoritarianism, a Call to Action: Reaffirming Our Covenant for Democracy and Freedom"

"We Declare and Affirm: Immigrants are People Who Have Inherent Worth and Inalienable Rights"

Elected co-moderators, Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson and Bill Young

Attending General Assembly 2026 Virtually, Meet the Moment: Together Everywhere," June 14 - 21

Submitted by Teresa Wilmot

Nominating Panel

The Nominating Panel had a particularly significant and meaningful year during the 2025–2026 church term. In addition to our regular responsibilities of identifying and encouraging leadership within the congregation, the Panel undertook the important work of creating the Settled Ministry Search Committee during a pivotal time in the life of our church.

I would like to recognize and thank the dedicated members of the Nominating Panel for their thoughtful work, discernment, and commitment throughout this process: Katy Conrad, Spitty Tata, Rich McKnight, Matt Menze, and myself as Chair. The work of forming the Search Committee required many conversations, careful consideration, and a deep commitment to the future of our congregation. I am especially grateful for the collaborative spirit shown throughout the process, including the support of the Board of Trustees, who assisted by reaching out to members of the congregation during the committee formation process. Their partnership helped make this important work possible.

In addition to the successful creation of the Settled Ministry Search Committee, the Nominating Panel was also able to fill an unexpected mid-term vacancy on the Covenant & Safety Team, ensuring that important ministry continued without interruption.

The Panel also completed its annual responsibility of preparing a slate of candidates for open church leadership positions for the upcoming term, including:

- One nomination for Treasurer
- One nomination for Vice President
- One nomination for Trustee
- Four nominations for the Nominating Panel

It has been an honor to serve as Chair of the Nominating Panel during such an important season in the life of our church. I would also like to thank the congregation for the trust and opportunity to serve in this role.

Respectfully submitted,

Renee Mealey
Chair, Nominating Panel

Caring Team Annual Report

Caring Team and Membership and Belonging Subcommittee see the Co Minister of Congregational Life Report.

Membership Team

Caring Team and Membership and Belonging Subcommittee see the Assistant Minister's Report.

Membership Information and Rites of Passage

Weddings

None

Memorials and Committals

Anthony Tzemopoulos, January 10, 2026

Jesse Parker, January 31, 2026

New or Reactivated Members since June 2025

Eileen Kegel

Jodell Gabriel

Marty Gabriel

Marlene Walker

Corey Hutchins

Kate Hutchins

Hanni Sherman

Liljana Baddour

Monica Walk

Jon Mark Bolthouse

Sarah Greyson

Clara Dahlenburg

Aisha Moe-Lindvall

Stanley Campbell

Sara Garl

Religious Growth & Learning

Members: Art Beneditz (chair), Verónica Soria Martínez, Kendra Asbury

The RE team has been officially re-formed and a charter was written this year, but we still haven't settled into a consistent meeting cadence. We hope to come into the next church year with fresh energy.

The RE program itself is holding steady. This past year has seen ebbs and flows of volunteers, ending with a pretty significant shortage of volunteers at all grade levels. With the small core of dedicated volunteers we've been able to maintain the program, but it's been difficult to grow the program and get deeper into age-specific curricula. With the low volunteer numbers combined with the small number of children in the 4-6 grade age group, we've often had to combine age groups. Hopefully next year we can grow the base of dedicated volunteers, reducing the burden on each volunteer while allowing us to focus more on age-appropriate teaching and give the children and youth expanded perspectives and opportunities.

As part of the new RE charter, the UU Unite and Explore activities started on their own, but have come under the umbrella of the RE Team. These activities have been a great step in fostering community, though attendance at the various events has been up and down. The RE team will use this information while planning out next year's activities in the hope that this community can continue to grow and thrive moving forward.

Faith in Action Ministry

We reorganized our Faith in Action (aka Social Justice) ministry last year and have been working on living into this new model and vision. We are focused on three issue/action teams and are adding a “UU The Vote” team. In all this new work, the emphasis is on spiritually grounded partnerships and learning, acting, and organizing that brings people together and builds community. There is a Core Team that coordinates this work and does administrative work of this ministry.

Sex and Gender Justice team

We used part of our budget for UU Rockford to become an affiliate member of the UU Women’s Federation. We are just beginning to explore the possibilities this membership opens up, for networking, social justice action and resources. The Women’s Federation’s purpose—to build “covenantal relationships amongst UU women+ that equip us all to be better co-conspirators and allies in the movement for collective liberation”—intersects all three of our Faith In Action teams’ goals, and we hope to join with the other teams to plan more Women’s Federation events in the coming year.

Our Wonderful Wednesdays included a visit to Midwest Reproductive Health in October 2025, a Queer elders panel discussion in February, 2026, and a viewing and discussion of the documentary *Disclosure* (part 1) in May, 2026.

We were a sponsor of the LIAM Foundation Gayla in October with several church members attending. We Shared the Plate with the LIAM Foundation, Scotti’s Fund, Midwest Reproductive Health, Howard Brown Health, the Forest City Rainbow Chorus, and Rockford Sexual Abuse Counseling.

With the help of a donation from Rich McKnight and Bill Schuyler, we were able to make a new banner in time for the 2026 Rockford Pride Parade. The slogan on the old banner, “Standing on the Side of Love,” has been updated by the UUA to a more inclusive “Side With Love.” The new banner has this update and, unlike the old banner, includes the name of our church.

The Racial and Economic Justice Team

*The team met monthly on the second Sunday of each month, 11 meetings total.

*The team also hosted monthly Service Reflections and Hospitality.

*The REj team hosted a book discussion, "The 12 Myths of Homelessness", at Inscape Collective, in January of 2025.*Also in January we heard from Anthony Keene and his work with Eliminate Racism 815, All Faith Team, and how we can collaborate with this work.

*There was much discussion by the team at the January meeting about the church's ICE policy and if we should install a banner on the church grounds. Scott took on the task of talking to the board about this important issue. As a result of this discussion, in March signs were posted at the church property entrance and at the front door.

*Ellyn started us on a project to identify our partners and how we will support them in the future. Linda Johnson formulated a congregational survey asking what the congregation is already involved in. We discussed how we might collaborate with these groups. Liaisons were chosen.

*In September a panel on Homelessness was featured for our Wonderful Wednesday event.

. *In October of 2025, we participated in a city wide peace vigil in Haight Park in Rockford, and the Crop Walk for Hunger.

*In November of 2025, we began a common read book discussion, "Social Change Now".

*Our book discussion "Social Change Now" began in April.

*We sponsored a DRUMM Public Worship event in May.

*We also formed a task force, "Upholding Faith" to work on exposing the dangers of Christian Nationalism, and ways we can be a positive influence to combat this dangerous movement. Liljana Baddour will be leading the task force and coordinating our Action Plans along with Gloria, Scott and the other team members. This is in response to the recent lecture at our church by Dr. Ward.

*Tim Anderson will be leading a book discussion on the subject.

*For June, we will be participating in Rockford's Pride Parade on the 6th and continuing to work on our Action Plan for the remainder of the year.

Submitted by: Gloria Perez and Scott Garwick

Eco Justice Team

The Eco Justice Team planned three Wonderful Wednesdays this past year. November 2025 was an all ages event inspired by the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. March was a celebration of the Spring Equinox, and the June event will be decided at our May 31 meeting.

The Eco Justice Team has continued to sponsor the compost bucket from Nettle Curbside Compost that is available for use during Coffee Hour. We also worked with Autumn and Nettle to turn the UU Church into a swap spot for Nettle Compost, making composting more available to the community at large.

Our team also continues to maintain the pantry. This year, we brought more of the whole congregation into the work of stocking the pantry, with a signup calendar available for congregants to volunteer. It continues to be a well used resource for the community.

In the coming year, we plan to sustain our composting and pantry work and hope to engage more members - including in restoration work on our grounds and in participation in partner events and our own events. Rebecca Beneditz will also be stepping down as an Eco Justice team leader, and Lillie Christiansen will be replacing her in fall 2026.

Submitted by Rebecca Beneditz

Music Team

See Music Director Report

Annual Meeting Minutes

Sunday, June 8, 2025 11:20 a.m.

Call to Order Matt Menze

Review of Rules of Procedure for Congregational Meeting

1. The Chair will verify that a quorum has been reached, validating any actions taken at the meeting.
2. Only members may vote; friends may speak but not vote.
3. The Parliamentarian will advise the chair as necessary to enforce compliance with the church bylaws, the rules adopting to govern the meeting, and Robert's Rules of Order.
4. Rulings on procedure will be made by the chair, may be appealed by seconded motion, and may be overturned by simple majority.
5. Speakers will speak only to the motion under consideration.
6. The first speaker will speak in favor of the motion, with subsequent speakers alternating between against and in favor of the motion. Each speaker will be limited to three minutes.
7. At any time, any member may call the question. At that time, the chair will inquire if there is any further discussion. If there is further discussion, it will precede.
8. At any time, any member may move the previous question, which is a motion to close debate. If two thirds of those present support the moving of the previous question, the motion under consideration will immediately be voted upon without further debate.
9. Voting will be done by voice vote. For some meetings, the Board may determine that the voting may be done by secret ballot. If a verification is requested, voting will be by showing of hands holding membership verification cards. If a member leaves the meeting before adjournment, the member must return the membership verification card to the membership committee table.
10. The meeting will be conducted in a civil manner.

The motion to approve the Minutes of June 9, 2024, Annual Meeting (posted online in the Annual Report) was made by Jon McGinty, seconded by Ed Kuehl and passed by majority vote.

Annual Report for 2024-2025 is available online and in the church office upon request

The motion to approve the Panel was made by Andy Larson, seconded by Peggy Menze, and passed by majority vote.

Election of Officers Renee Mealey

President Wendy Bennett (1 year term)

Vice President Diane Kuehl (1 year term)

Clerk Scott Garwick (1 year term)

Treasurer Bob Spelman (1 year term)

Trustee Kendra Asbury (3 year term)

Note: Clark Logemann & Neita Webster will continue to serve as Trustees.

Election of Nominating Panel members: Renee Mealey

Matt Menze (2 year term)
Rich McKnight (2 year term)

Note: Spitty Tata, Katy Conrad, and Renee Mealey will continue to serve on the Nominating Panel.

Election of Covenant and Safety Team

Renee Mealey

Teresa Palmeno (3 year term)

Note: Amy Brandon and Alexis Simmons will continue to serve on the Covenant and Safety Team

The motion to approve the Vision and Mission was made by Amy Brandon, seconded by Spitty Tata, and passed by majority vote.

Vision:

Wendy Bennett

A loving, spiritual congregation that lives our values through belonging, reason, and action.

Mission:

Like the nature that surrounds us, we evolve as a habitat for spiritual development.

- Our deep roots connect us to a wealth of resources that nourish our growth as a beacon for justice, inclusion, and liberation, especially anti-racism and gender and sexuality justice.
- Our listening cultivates diverse and multicultural relationships that bridge divisions, strengthen our communities, heal hearts, and foster safety for all.
- Our awareness of our interdependence inspires us to protect the shared environment and natural world in which we live.

Presentation on the Strategic Plan

Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

The motion to approve the 2025-2026 Permanent Fund Income Allocation was made by Jon Ginty, seconded by Steve Blomgren, and passed by majority vote.

Teresa Wilmot

Programs and Growth	\$22,100
Facility and Equipment	\$18,400
Capital Reserve*	\$27,700
Outreach (Justice)	\$8,800
Totals	\$77,000

**In approving the allocation of these funds, the congregation authorizes the Board to approve expenditures of the Capital Maintenance Reserve Fund, upon the recommendation of the Building and Grocongregationunds and Finance Committees, without additional approval from the congregation.*

The motion to approval of 2025-2026 Annual Operating Budget was made by Dave Black, seconded by Neita Webster, and passed by majority vote.

Bob Spelman

Recognitions:

Those completing and continuing terms of office Wendy Bennett

Charles Parker Connolly Award
Sara Dady

Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Memorial Moments

Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Barb Oehlke

Larry Heibner

Randy Locke

Tom Hunter

Skip Abare

Andrea Schultz

Jackson Foster

Sonia Vogl

Jim Spelman

Jack Burti

Ed Miller

Twenty-Five & Fifty Year Members Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Pete Anderson-25

Mike Ullrich-25

Deb Rose-25

Martha Pippitt – 50

Neita Webster - 50

Unitarian Universalist of the Year Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Kim Lowman Vollmer

Adjournment 11:55 am Matt Menze

Approximately 75 in attendance.

2025-2026 Budget

Key Points

Total pledge income is projected at 385,000. This is close to last year, and a big increase from two years ago – to hold steady in this uncertain economy is good news.

Woodsong income is projected at \$119,100, resulting in a \$14,954 profit after expenses. We increased tuition slightly. The program is fully enrolled for summer and fall, with 2-day, 3-day, and 5-day options for programs. Lindsay Trank deserves much credit and thanks for making this happen, and managing a very difficult staff transition last year.

Spectrum will pay \$49,200 in annual rent. An increase is built in each year. This continues to be a good relationship for both parties.

There is an auction in this budget. We had a successful auction last year – thank you Alexis and Rebecca and all who helped with that. We need volunteers again this year, so please participate.

This budget pays most of our employees on the UUA Fair Compensation schedule.

Lindsay received a large raise in the middle of last year in recognition of her increased duties as sole director of Woodsong; that was an 18-month raise so she holds steady.

Tim and Rev. Joyce receive cost-of-living increases of 2.5%. Our new custodian, Michelle, has a 5% raise. Autumn has moved up her level of responsibility, and thus her place on the Fair Compensation guideline. She should receive a 22% raise, we are doing 12.5% this year with a commitment to do the same next year.

The Senior Minister position is receiving a 1% increase.

We will pay \$21,000 for our UUA Fair Share. This is about 2/3rd of the requested amount.

Most of the rest of the budget is flat, with minor changes here and there.

2025-2026 Budget Summary

Income	
Pledges	384,000
Misc. Income & Rentals	89,200
Woodsong Income	119,100
Fundraisers	12,000
Church Organization Income	1,250
Allocations of Permanent Funds Income	77,000
Total Income	682,550
Expenses	
Staff Salary & Benefits	
	Proposed
Minister Salary (and Housing)	109,050
Minister Benefits and Other Expenses	50,451
Music Director Salary	43,050
Music Director Benefits/Other	10,509
Assistant Minister Salary	37,412
Assistant Minister Benefits/etc	12,633
Office Manager Salary	48,375
Office Manager Benefits	9,730
Dir. of Religious Education Salary	29,288
Dir. of Religious Education Benefits/etc	11,660
Bookkeeper (contracted)	8,400
Custodial Salary and Taxes	8,464
Subtotal	379,021
Administration Expense	
Insurance, Office, Finance	40,420

Building and Grounds	80,472
Denominational Contribution – should be \$28,029	21,000
	Subtotal 141,892
Programs and Committees	
Worship & Music	8,400
Religious Growth & Learning	11,459
Woodsong	104,146
Outreach & Social Justice	31,100
Other Committees	6,532
	Subtotal 161,637
Total Expenses	682,550
Total Net Income	0