



**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF SURPRISE  
2024 Annual Congregational Meeting  
Sunday, January 19, 2025  
12:00PM  
Meeting Materials**

This packet contains:

- Agenda
- Voting Information
- Minutes from January 7, 2024 Annual Meeting
- 2025 Slate of Nominating Committee
- 2025 Slate of Board
- Proposed 2025 Operating Budget (Separate email attachment)
- Staff and Committee Reports

The 2024 Financials will be sent out separately on 01/08/2025.

**UUCS**

**2024 ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

January 19, 2025  
12:00 PM (Sanctuary)  
Agenda

**CALL TO ORDER**

Determination of Quorum

Lighting of the Chalice

2024 Remembrances

Minutes of 2023 Annual Meeting of January 7, 2024

Brooke Gaunt

Susie Cole

Emily Whitmore

Pastor Karen Richter/Brooke Gaunt

Susie Cole

**REPORTS**

Minister's Report

President's Report

Treasurer's Report

Pastor Karen Richter

Brooke Gaunt

Jan Murphy

**NEW BUSINESS**

Nominating Committee Report

Slate of Nominees for Nominating Committee

Congregational Vote

Claudia Yeager-Smith

Slate of Nominees for Board of Trustees

Congregational Vote

2025 Proposed Budget

Congregational Vote

Jan Murphy

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Volunteer of the Year Award

Emily Whitmore

**RECOGNITION/CLOSING**

**ADJOURNMENT**

Brooke Gaunt

**VOTING INFORMATION**

The Board of Trustees has called the Annual Meeting for January 19, 2025 at 12:00PM. The purpose of this meeting will be to report on the state of the congregation, the election of the Board and members of the nominating committee as well as passage of the 2025 budget. Voting will be done by paddle which will be distributed before the meeting to all members.

All Materials needed for voting will be included in this packet. In accordance with our bylaws, only the items on the meeting agenda will be considered for voting. Motions will be made and seconded from the floor prior to each vote. We welcome friends and visitors to attend the meeting, but our bylaws stipulate that only members may vote and each member has one vote.

### **Minutes of UUCS Annual Meeting on January 7, 2024**

Present: President Sherry Robinson, Vice President Brooke Gaunt, Treasurer Janet Murphy, Secretary Susie Cole, Pastor Karen Richter, Trustees Liz Thomas, David King, and Emily Whitmore.

The meeting was called to order at 12:10 p.m. by Sherry Robinson. It was determined that a quorum was present at the meeting. Karen lit the chalice, and Sherry read a reflection for an annual meeting. Karen read the names of the members lost in the previous year. The minutes from the January 8, 2023, annual meeting were approved as corrected for the spelling of Marilyn Kluge's name.

#### Reports/Information:

**Minister's Report:** Pastor Karen referred the congregation to her written report that was sent out prior to the meeting and highlighted some of the topics in it. What she has seen so far has strengthened her hope for the future for us as an intentional family.

**President's Report:** Sherry listed many accomplishments in her written report that was sent out before the meeting. She had unintentionally omitted all the work that was completed on the Safety Project by Liz Thomas with help from Sharon Steigmann. We have a new Safety Policy and have conducted active shooter safety training. We had fire drill training followed by an unannounced fire drill. The vandalized banner about inclusion has been mended and put out again after the most recent incident. We won't replace the destroyed letters of the church name until we complete the renaming project. The Surprise Police are aware of the vandalism but have declined to investigate. Sherry thanked Liz and Sharon for their work.

Focusing on what was new, Sherry recounted the work of the Ministerial Search Committee that led to two dead ends within the UUA search process and culminating with the hiring of Pastor Karen Richter as a contract minister. This was a different approach that has led to a new outlook and new ideas. She thanked Karen for her service these past four months. Also new to UUCS is the formation of a Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagan group associated with the UUA. Sherry thanked the congregation for supporting the new ideas and supporting the Board of Trustees.

**Treasurer's Report:** Janet Murphy sent 2023 financial reports prior to the meeting and had printed, updated reports available outside the sanctuary. The latest report reflects Identified Contributions (pledge payments) of \$210,000. She anticipates we may have a \$10,000 overage when the books are closed for 2023. This would allow her to return

\$10,000 to Operating Reserves. She thanked Mary Ellen Baker and Margaret Leahy for their work over the past two years. Not having a paid half-time music director for half of the year gave us more flexibility to use our money in 2023.

**Stewardship Update:** Janet Jeffrey reported on status of the 2024 stewardship campaign. The 2024 pledge goal is \$225,000 – the same as the 2023 goal. We have 80 pledges totaling \$173,000 – 77% of our goal. This is the lowest we've been at for some time. She thanked the Stewardship Committee and encouraged the congregation to attend fundraising events. Even though the official pledge drive is over, pledges can be made anytime during the year.

**Program Reports:** These reports were sent out ahead of the meeting, except for the Music Committee Report by Mary Anne Poggenburg. It was available in printed form outside the sanctuary.

#### New Business:

**Nominating Committee:** Rich Manalis, outgoing chair of the Nominating Committee presented the slate of nominees for the 2024 Nominating Committee:

Claudia Yeager Smith – 2<sup>nd</sup> term

BJ Martindale – 2<sup>nd</sup> term

Sierra Rose– new member

Beth Malmgren – new member

Ray Mahoney Jr. – new member

Lois Bartels moved, John Benfield seconded, and the congregation voted unanimously to approve the slate.

Rich presented the slate of nominees for the open Board positions:

Brooke Gaunt, President – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Emily Whitmore, Vice President – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Janet Murphy, Treasurer – 2<sup>nd</sup> term

Barry Linden, Trustee – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Juliet Gustavson, Trustee – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Rich Manalis, Trustee – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Darren Reale moved, Claudia Czeczyk seconded, and the congregation voted unanimously to approve the slate.

**Proposed 2024 Operating Budget:** Janet reported that 5 people participated in the Zoom town hall meetings to discuss the proposed budget. The proposed budget along with a summary of budget highlights was sent out prior to the Zoom meetings and an updated version sent out prior to the annual meeting with copies available outside the sanctuary. Jan pointed out that salary expenses are the largest part of our operating budget. Over time, the board wants to align the salaries with UUA guidelines. While the cost of living was up 3.2 percent for the year, the board voted to propose a 1.5 percent raise because of the lower pledge numbers. The music budget has increased considerably with the hiring of a half-time Music Director. In fact, hiring younger staff members raises the benefit costs when employees are not eligible for Medicare. While this is not a budgeted increase in staff size from recent years, we are now fully staffed for the first time in several years. After discussion, the board decided it was time to hire

an accounting firm to handle payroll, bill paying and other financial functions. Bills will still come to us, be approved, and then passed on for payment. The \$6,000 annual cost will be partially offset by the expense of our contract payroll person who is retiring. Jan answered several questions about the proposed budget and clarified some of the figures. She pointed out that the operating budget does not include capital expenditures such as the recent HVAC and future HVAC replacements. Those come from capital improvement funds. She also pointed out that we have several options to close the possible budget gap later in the year if we need to act. The board will address it at that time. We do not anticipate cutting programs or staff. Jan anticipates it will be tight but doesn't anticipate it will be \$48,000 short (the difference between budgeted pledges \$225,000 and current 2024 pledges \$177,000). More pledges and other fundraising activities will help the budget. Ruth Halpert moved, and Bob Walling seconded the approval of the proposed \$297,000 2024 budget. The motion passed unanimously. Jan reiterated her desire that people contact her any time with questions.

**Bylaws Amendments – VI (Minister) and VII (Finance):** Sherry reported that the proposed bylaw changes under VI will bring our Bylaws in compliance with UUA requirements for Ministerial Search Committee selection and make-up. Suzi Walling moved, Reggie Johnston seconded, and the congregation voted unanimously to approve the proposed changes. We now have an active Finance Committee with a new Finance Policy. The proposed changes to Section VII come from the Finance Committee and bring the bylaws in line with their recommendations. Section 5, Review of Statements, proposed amendment makes modifications to align the Finance Policy and the Bylaws. Bob Walling moved, Barry Linden seconded, and the congregation voted unanimously to adopt the proposed changes to Section VII, 5. Finally, Section 2C, Budget, the proposed amendment recommends a reduction to the percent increase a board can make to the Operating Budget before going to the congregation for a vote. This change recommends the board could change up to 5 percent rather than the current up to 10 percent. Bob Walling moved, John Benfield seconded, and the congregation voted to approve the proposed changes. There was one dissenting vote.

#### Announcements:

**Legacy Gifts:** Sherry shared the news of recent legacy gifts left to UUCS. Near the end of last year, we received \$68,000 from Lee Ormsbee's estate. Part of the funds were put into the operating funds, and the rest were used to pay for the reworked irrigation system and the new flooring in all the rooms but the sanctuary. Mary Ellen Foscett left us \$10,000 in her estate. We received the funds in the fall. In November, we were notified we would be receiving \$384,414 from Bruce Sorter's estate. We should be receiving the funds in 2024. This is in addition to the annual funds Bruce had been giving UUCS. An agreement between Bruce and UUCS directed the annual funds to be spent on projects supporting the Golden Rule. Past funds have been spent on books, RE programs, sermons, and other projects. The Sorter funds are a result of work in 2020 by Bob and Suzi Walling and Rev. Terry Sims. The Investment Committee will guide the investment of the funds, and earnings will be used for appropriate expenditures.

**Name Change Project:** Brooke reported that we have extended the time until January 12, for congregants to send in their top five preferences for the name of UUCS. There

will be a Zoom meeting on January 17 and an in-person meeting on January 19 to discuss the top five choices. We will still be affiliated with UUA. Our current name could be one of the choices. Brooke asked people to let her know if they didn't get the emails about voting for the top 5. We're hoping to finalize it sometime in February.

**Volunteer of the Year Award:** Brooke pointed out that the congregation would not survive without volunteers and thanked everyone who gives time to the congregation. She announced that the **Volunteer of the Year Award** goes to Sherry Robinson for all the time and effort she put in this year and over all the years of her board presidency. This included Covid shutdown, Zoom services and meetings, Terry Sims' retirement, new staff and new ministers, new committees and policies plus all the usual duties of a board president. Sherry thanked the staff, committees, members, and everyone. She appreciates all and will miss everyone as she and Steve relocate to Portland. Sherry read a closing reflection and Karen extinguished the candle. The meeting was adjourned at 1:42 p.m.

**Nominating Committee Report and 2025 Slates**  
**Claudia Yeager-Smith, Chair**

2025 Nominating Committee Slate  
Sierra Rose (Returning for 2<sup>nd</sup> term)  
Ray Mahoney (Returning for 2<sup>nd</sup> term)  
Charlene Broom (New)  
David King (New)

2025 Board Slate  
Brooke Gaunt, President (Returning)  
Emily Whitmore, Vice President (Returning)  
Jan Murphy, Treasurer (Returning)  
Paige Rappleeye, Secretary (New)  
Rich Manalis, Trustee (Returning)  
Lois Bartels (New, 1 year term to complete Juliet Gustavson's term)  
Tom Reemtsma (New)

### **Treasurer's Budget Report** **Jan Murphy**

1. A major focus of this budget was to bring our employees to the mid-level pay scale recommended by UUA for employees of our congregation size. We considered their levels of responsibility and feel this proposal achieves what we began in the 2024 budget. We used a Cost-of-Living Adjustment of 3% on salary proposals. We also added an increment to Lisa Lawrence's pay; she has advanced the Family Ministry program during her 13-year employment and received few pay raises during this time.
2. Entering 2024 we knew we needed to replace 8 HVAC units installed when we built in 1999. We had planned to do 2 each year but in 2024 we were forced to replace 3 of them, and our 16-ton unit for the sanctuary is scheduled for this spring. These are not budgeted items and will be covered by investment earnings.
3. Funding for the year continues to include the goal for pledges with the same target as 2024 - \$225,000.
4. The Bruce Sorter Golden Rule Endowment Fund is now providing new revenue to the budget for Golden Rule projects.
5. In June we hired a local company, R&B Bookkeeping Services, to handle all bill payment and payroll responsibilities. They also prepare financial statements and reconcile all bank, credit card, and investment accounts. This professional approach has made our finances more manageable and reliable.
6. Our electric budget is higher because the extreme heat continues to deplete our solar credits earlier each year; we're hoping the replacement of 5 of the 9 HVAC units will lessen our electricity demand. The cost to insure our building did rise but not significantly when considering our large damage claim in 2024. Our HOA cost of \$9,464 did not go up for 2025 and our budget for the UUA Program Fund is again half of the amount suggested by the UUA.
7. The student aides will be paid according to the new Arizona minimum wage rate of \$14.70 per hour. An increase in enrollment has necessitated the hiring of 3 each Sunday.

8. A new budget item involves funding for attendance at General Assembly. The pastor and family minister will attend using their professional development accounts. The social activities account has extra money budgeted for a birthday celebration.

OF NOTE:

The Board of Trustees reviews 2 reports each month that show actuals versus budget and a balance sheet; the final 2024 report will be reviewed at the March BOT meeting. The final report and monthly reports are available to members from the email address [uucsaztreas@gmail.com](mailto:uucsaztreas@gmail.com)

## **Minister Report Pastor Karen Richter**

Greetings beloveds, in compassion and in the strong and beautiful story of our Living Tradition.

It's my pleasure to remind you all of some of our events and accomplishments in 2024 and to provide some context for moving into 2025. I recall our accomplishments with gratitude and humility.

### 2024 Highlights:

- Pastoral/Community connections: Sermon Reboot, Summer Sharing Table
- Befriending the Principles - an opportunity to explore and discuss the UU 7 Principles in preparation for changes of the UUA Bylaws Article 2
- Intergenerational services led by our Director of Family Ministry
- Continuing membership growth
- Full staffing for a majority of the year
- Enthusiastic participation in General Assembly, which included the adoption of the new UUA Article 2 shared values
- UU the Vote activities
- Interactive worship opportunities: creativity panel on Easter and "Flipped" series in May
- Community outreach: concerts, financial assistance, Phoenix Pride, trunk or treat, Homebase meal preparation and service, City of Surprise Golden Rule Breakfast
- Energy and momentum regarding our name change and mission statement work; implementation of name change including new logo and branding
- Consistent good humor and patience regarding our facilities damage and the process of repair and improvement

### Things to look for in 2025:

- Spiritual Practices for UUs - rescheduled for February 2025 due to my illness
- Creating Theology Together (statewide UU spiritual formation)
- OWL facilitator training - a weekend training program for adults who want to lead Our Whole Lives programs in congregations and community organizations (another opportunity for our family ministry programming to stretch and shine!)



- Additional programming and outreach connected to the Dr Bruce Sorter Golden Rule Fund

I've shared with the board some of my personal goals for 2025:

1. Clarity around social justice, community outreach work, and Golden Rule activities.

We don't always have a good sense of what activities we undertake are social justice and what activities are something else. All these things are important, but it will be good to assess how we are spending our time, energy, and financial resources in each of these categories.

I anticipate that our completed mission and vision process will help us make decisions and shape our actions in these areas.

2. UU identity work - concrete work with at least one other AZ UU congregation

I was disappointed in the low registration numbers for our state-wide UU formation program, Creating Theology Together. Rescheduling this program for early 2025 is a definite priority. In addition, I would like to see at least one Questers / adult education offering with a focus on UU theology (or history or social justice) during each programming season.

We're a unique UU congregation, due to our 'in-between' size and our location/culture. I want us to embrace this role and the opportunities it provides for us. There are UU congregations in big progressive cities with big progressive social justice actions. And there are UU congregations struggling to fully understand social justice and systemic oppression / white supremacy. It's my vision that UUCS serve as a bridge between these kinds of UU expressions - caring for and accepting one another AND caring for people and the planet. Our work to make sense of capitalism and climate change and a way forward - shared honestly and with authenticity - can help others find their way.

3. "Wrap around" worship planning

It's been my experience that ideas can better take hold in people's hearts and minds when they encounter them in more than one setting. This can involve a deeper dive into some of our juicier worship themes, with discussion, mid-week readings, social media engagement, and even hands-on opportunities for action. We've begun this kind of programming already, with Sermon Reboot discussions. In 2025, I want to do more to engage our deep thinking and our best efforts throughout the week.

It's my great privilege to include in this report specific news regarding a legacy gift we received in 2024. Dr. Bruce Sorter provided funds before his death to promote the Golden Rule as a way of life. After Bruce passed, his generosity continued and

expanded with a \$368,000 gift to establish the Dr. Bruce Sorter Golden Rule Fund. The earnings from the fund's investments will be used to promote the Golden Rule in our community and beyond. In 2024, we were able to be a major sponsor for the City of Surprise's Golden Rule Community Breakfast. In 2025, we'll be dreaming even bigger, looking for ways to make a difference with compassion and reciprocity.

The upcoming 2024/2025 Annual Meeting marks 16 months that I have been in ministry among you. Your support and care, the grace you've displayed, your encouragement and patience are such gifts. My enthusiasm for our community and my hope for the future remain steadfast. I am grateful for you all.

### **President's Report Brooke Gaunt**

I'd say that 2024 flew by! Am I the only one feeling that way? We have had a very busy year at UUCS. We have had several struggles this year (Can you say major sewage back-up?) but our members, board, and committees have all stepped up and responded in big ways. Our kitchen and half of the Social Hall was non-operable for six months of the year. However, we were able to pivot for both the Annual Auction and our usual Coffee Hour on Sundays. We are flexible at UUCS. There is certainly an abundance of grace and an ability to handle difficult situations. Steve Calkins did a fantastic job coordinating the rebuild and installation of a new commercial dishwasher. Board Treasurer, Jan Murphy, did a great job of handling the Homeowners Insurance claim and expenses for the rebuild. See her Treasurer Report for the nitty gritty details but it appears our only out of pocket costs were for the plumbing dig and repair. The Kitchen/Social Hall rebuild was our largest issue this year for sure. It did allow us to upgrade to a new commercial dishwasher so we can stop using paper products and to install a hot/cold water dispenser to replace the old water fountains. The commercial dishwasher and sustainable dishware was purchased using a very generous anonymous \$10,000 donation.

The other major improvement this year was our new name and logo: We are now the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Surprise! This was a long time coming and I am happy to have it done. Like the bathroom signs in 2023, this change renews our commitment to Radical Welcoming!

At the all-virtual UUA GA in June 2024, our three delegates, Paige Rappelye, Emily Whitmore, and Darren Reale, voted to approve the amendments to Article II of the UUA bylaws. This modified our 7 principles to 7 Values with Love at the Center! This change places love as our core value and includes our commitment to anti-oppression across all of the values.

And we continued to move forward with our Sunday Worship Services, programs, and special events. Our tech team lead, Evert Adams, was able to recruit and train several new Tech Booth volunteers to replace several vacancies. We now have 3 separate 2-person teams to keep the audio and streaming running! Evert also donated a brand-new computer for the sound booth! The project to update the audio system to improve the sound quality is continuing and we are hoping that we will have that started and completed in the first quarter of 2025. Jeff London coordinated our work for Homebase

with volunteers from UUCS cooking dinner 4 times a week for the young adult residents there. UUCS once again had a strong showing at the Phoenix Pride Parade with a decorated truck and balloon rainbow! Emily Whitmore created tshirts for our congregation that folks debuted at the parade. See Emily if you want to order one for yourself!

Michael Piper led a large group of Good Troublemakers in the UU The Vote program. Although the election may not have turned out as someone of us would have liked it, it was certainly not for lack of effort!

Our All-Ages and Adult-only Dungeons and Dragons groups led by our professional Dungeonmaster, Morgan Oviatt, continued to be a joy for members and folks from outside the congregation.

Our UUCS-affiliated Pagan Group, The Spirit of the Sacred Journey, continued to host normal meetings and special ceremonies and rituals at UUCS. The group hosted a bake sale with all proceeds going to UUCS to show their appreciation for our continued support.

Thanks to the Dr. Bruce Sorter Golden Rule Fund, UUCS was a major sponsor for the City of Surprise Golden Rule Breakfast. Pastor Karen delivered one of the interfaith prayers and Board Vice President Emily Whitmore spoke about how we at UUCS follow the Golden Rule.

In September, the Board voted to extend Pastor Karen's contract for another year. In 2024, Pastor Karen has been an integral part of our community! Early in 2025, we will begin some cottage meetings to discuss the future of our ministry. Stay tuned for updates about those meetings. We want to hear from everyone!

We had great music and special concerts! See Luke's report and the music committee report for more details on that! We are so lucky to have Luke! Not only is he a phenomenal musician but he also knows the UU hymnal better than almost anyone.

We had fantastic and dynamic family programming once again. See Lisa's report for more information. She again coordinated an egg hunt at Easter, a unique summer program for the kids, a spook Trunk R Treat (which was open to the public), and a wonderful, adapted holiday play! Lisa had been with UUCS for 13 years and is an absolute treasurer. Her creativity and commitment to our kids enrichment is second to none! We had thought-provoking and spiritually expanding Questers offerings from members and outside speakers. See Juliet's Questers Report for more details. Under Juliet's leadership, Questers has continued to have numerous and varied offerings.

Our congregational administration resigned unexpectedly and without notice in January 2024. In early Spring, member Gail Manahan, was hired first as an independent contractor and then as a half-time employee. Her wonderful smiling face greets visitors to our office and she has taken on many new admin and financial responsibilities as we try to move more of the day to day financial responsibilities to paid staff or contractors rather than our volunteer Board Treasurer and Co-Treasurer.

In Early Fall we began Mission and Vision work as well. This is still moving forward at this point with a small delay due to Pastor Karen's illness.

In Mid-October, Pastor Karen fell ill and was hospitalized for several weeks. Once again you were all flexible as we had other capable folks leading us in worship. She continues to recuperate but is slowing resuming her work as our spiritual leader.

I continue to feel the positive momentum at UUCS! Sure we experience setbacks and we make mistakes, we are only human after all. But fundamentally I believe that at UUCS, we center Love for all, we seek Justice, we strive for Equity, we believe in Interdependence, we encourage Pluralism, and emphasize Generosity. As my first year as your board president comes to an end, I truly believe that Love is at the Center of UUCS!

### **Treasurer's Report Jan Murphy**

This again was a year for projects related to our aging building.

We paid for these major unbudgeted projects with investment funds:

HVAC repairs and replacement of 3 units (\$33,696)

Downpayment on 15-ton HVAC ordered for spring 2025 (\$17,000)

Major sewer work not covered by insurance (\$29,769)

Recoat of rubber roofing (\$5360)

Microwave oven and water dispenser (\$550)

We received \$55,408 from our insurance claim to:

Remove damaged material

Replace carpeting

Rebuild kitchen cabinets

Reimburse for lost rental income

Replace items ruined by water

Reimburse for some donation revenue lost while closed

We purchased a high-tech dishwasher and new dishes through an anonymous donation of \$10,000 designated for the kitchen remodel. The remainder is reserved for eventual appliance replacement.

Multiple fundraisers earned \$14,964.40. Congratulations to all who organized and/or participated. Our budgeted goal was \$15,000.

We now have 3 Fidelity accounts: Bruce Sorter Golden Rule Endowment, Endowment, and Other (which holds our Operating Reserve, Capital Reserve, and Capital Funds).

We currently have Restricted Funds (designated for special use) totaling about \$10,000.

Further information on our investments is found in the Investment Committee report.

We've entered the 21st century and can now take credit card payments in person using credit card readers and phones with appropriate software. This will be great for auction purchases. Please check the quarterly statements that you receive. We appreciate hearing about inconsistencies as soon as possible.

### **Family Ministry Report Lisa Lawrence**

I'm pleased to have completed my 14th year of providing faith formation classes and programs on behalf of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Surprise. Our program is in good shape with the assistance of five trained teaching assistants and help from family volunteers and supporters to cover three classrooms each Sunday morning.

Family ministry program literature reflects our current curriculum and recent adoption of Shared Values; bookmarks and new signage was made for each classroom. Family Ministry updates have also been submitted for the congregation's website and the UUC

Surprise Family Facebook page continues to serve as an efficient communication tool to reach families and supporters on a weekly basis.

We had a good time last year, too, and always encourage intergenerational attendance at all of our events. We hosted and organized The White Tanks Cookout, Vernal Holiday Art Exhibit, a Torch Run, Parade of Values, an Olympic Feast, the 5th annual Trunk-or-Treat, and a holiday party and Christmas-themed scavenger hunt. The Neighboring Faith Family Field Trip program provided the opportunity for participants to live their Shared Values, learn and support the community. We visited a Sikh temple and attended a “Shofar in the Park” event for Rosh Hashanah.

Accomplishments that I’m especially proud of are: organizing and facilitating the “Our Whole Lives” sex education workshop for 7th-10th graders, pitching the idea of offering three multi-generational services per year (and then helping to create and deliver them), writing a summer program that introduced the new UU “Shared Values” by using examples from the summer Olympics, and writing the script for and directing this year’s holiday play “Buddie the Elf Saves Christmas”.

In the coming year I’d like to continue offering Neighboring Faith Family Field trips and multi-generational services, but I’d especially like to provide opportunities for our families and members to participate in community service days. I also plan to offer K-1st and 4-6th grade “Our Whole Lives” workshops after arranging for the training of two, new, volunteer facilitators.

### **Music Ministry Report Luke Stikeleather**

This year has certainly been an exciting and dynamic year for the music program at UUCS. As I began my position here in January of 2024, both the congregation and I did not know what to expect of each other. I am happy to say that I felt fully welcomed and embraced very quickly by the staff, board, choir, and the congregation. Upon reflection of the year, I am struck by the growth and change in the excitement and commitment to music throughout the congregation. The choir has worked very hard to raise their standard of singing, which has enhanced worship and a sense of community. I have received many compliments on how the choir has been sounding recently, and the choir members hear this as well.

Something more important than the musical standard is the acquisition of new members to the choir- some of whom were not members of the church at first! This gets the message of what UUs are further out into the community, the importance of which cannot be overstated. The choir is a tight knit community, and means very much to each individual member. I am grateful for their commitment to me and to each other, and I look forward to another great year with them.

Beyond the choir, I have enjoyed bringing in contemporary music and solo singing to the services. Standard feel good hits ranging from the Beatles to Katy Perry, and other 2000s hits. I have also played some piano arrangements of these songs during the offertory and other musical reflective moments. I hope to have more soloist volunteers who are willing and excited to share some more modern music with the

congregation in the coming year.

As I look ahead to 2025, my biggest goal is to increase my collaboration with musicians both professional and amateur within the congregation. I have enjoyed working closely with congregants such as Maria, Kate, Jenny Su and her daughter, Danielle, Juliet, Maggi, Bob and more. I hope to create a more organized network of volunteer musicians who are just excited for the opportunity to share music with others! I hope to increase the diversity of music I present. Familiar music such as piano and voice, less familiar music such as flute or guitar, and even maybe something a bit quirky like the accordion!

I would also like to give a big thank you to the staff, board, and choir for accommodating my full time graduate student commitments and summer schedule with this position. I am so grateful to work remotely during the week, have mostly zoom meetings with Karen, and to pack on all in person rehearsals and other duties on Saturdays and Sundays. Traveling from Tempe during the week with my ASU classes just isn't feasible, and I am so thankful that you have been so generous in working with all the complexities of my schedule.

I look forward to 2025 with a sense of anticipation and excitement. I await a year of collaboration, fellowship, and creative exploration to share with the congregation. I am happy to speak to anyone on the board or in the congregation with any ideas or thoughts you may have regarding music at UUCS. Happy New Year!

## **Committee Reports**

### **Aesthetics Carol Calkins**

Committee members: Carol Calkins, Priscilla London, Joye Melby

Statement or Purpose:

The Aesthetics Committee's purpose is to enhance the appearance of our building including sanctuary, social hall, classrooms, offices and multipurpose rooms. In the sanctuary we

want to create a meaningful place for worship, in the social hall a warm and inviting place of

inclusion, in the classrooms a place that encourages learning and in the offices a place where

staff enjoys their work environment.

Work of the committee:

Flood

- This year the committee worked with many to clear out the kitchen after the flood and then organize the kitchen and closets once the replacement carpet was installed in the fall.

- The flood damaged Christmas tree was replaced with a new one

Traffic - The committee worked with the kitchen committee, David and Janet King and Kay Vogt to reorganize the traffic pattern for Sunday social hour.

- The line was moved to the opposite side to free up a traffic pattern to allow easy access to the bathrooms.
  - The trash and recycling were moved into the hallway for the same reason and to improve the appearance in the social hall.
  - The water cooler, which replaced the drinking fountain, was moved to the right side of the pass through window.
  - The computer and speakers were consolidated on one table freeing up space
- Artwork - donated artwork has been hung in the offices and office hallway.
- Ongoing work - Looking to the future the Aesthetics Committee is working on these continuing long term projects:
1. Rotate art and posters in the social hall to reflect UU values
  2. Hang artwork that is inclusive of many cultures
  3. Work with the staff in updating the look of their offices and work spaces. Karen has mentioned wanting more art in her office. Lisa has approved a remake of Diane Valdez banner to be hung in the multipurpose room. The multipurpose room needs more art.
  4. Find a banner for the blank front wall in the sanctuary.
- The goals of the committee are:
1. To complete the above projects in a way that builds community.
  2. To complete these projects in a timely manner staying within our budget.
  3. To critique loaned artwork to determine if it is appropriate.

## **Building & Grounds**

The Building & Grounds Inside Team is now lead by the Church Administrator. Most of the repairs and upgrades are mentioned in other portions of this document. The update from our Outside Lead, David Moore is as follows:

We hired a new landscaping service, Wayne's Landscaping, beginning May 2024. This group is charging UUCS \$480 per month, which is \$120 per month less than the previous cost. Wayne's is maintaining the grounds and communicating with us well.

We will maintain the parking in 2025 lot by sealing the serious cracks.

## **Investment** **Bill Hughes, Chair**

I was asked to chair this committee about two years ago. Several previous members have resigned or moved away. Therefore I was left as the only member. I was very apprehensive to make any serious changes in investment policy on my own. Much to my relief, Bob Walling and Sharon Moore have agreed to join me. We are planning a year-end meeting soon after I arrive in Surprise from our summer home in Utah. Many investment decisions date back to early 2022. At that time, the Board of Directors recommended an emphasis on ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) in our portfolio, and that profile has not changed.

We have three primary accounts. An Operating Fund, to meet day to day money requirements. An Endowment Fund to be used to supplement long term requirements

for capital purchases. There is also the Bruce Sorter bequest that is currently managed by Bob Walling.

All of the following fund values are current as of 12/17/2024.

Operating Fund

\$511,427 This represents a YTD increase of 21.6%

Endowment Fund

\$640,782. This represents a YTD increase of 21.5%

The following un-budgeted major projects were funded with investment funds:

Replacement 3 HVAC units (\$33,696)

Downpayment on ordered 15-ton HVAC (\$17,000)

Major sewer work not covered by insurance (\$29,769)

Re-coat of rubber roofing (\$5360)

Overall, our investments have done exceedingly well the past three years, thanks to a bullish stock market. Re-assessment of our funds and positions is my top priority heading into 2025.

**Lay Pastoral Care  
Pastor Karen Richter, Acting Chair**

The LPCC is a vital behind-the-scenes ministry at UUCS. Members of this committee are tasked with connecting confidentially with members and friends who are experiencing health challenges, grief, loneliness, and other difficulties. In addition, committee members provide a much valued check-in for the pastor regarding the overall spiritual wellbeing of the congregation.

This year, LPCC said a sad farewell to one of our gifted leaders, Sharon Beard, who moved away to be near family. New leaders and new members have taken their places among the committee, including Patricia Balfour, Joan Carlson, and Sierra Rose.

There are such strong gifts among this group! For 2025, we are seeking to “sharpen the saw” by building on and refreshing our skills in pastoral care including active listening, resource referral, and spiritual companionship.

We’re here for YOU. To connect with the Lay Pastoral Care Committee, reach out anytime to the UU office or to Pastor Karen or anyone on the committee.

**Membership Report  
Gail Manahan**



**Overview of Membership Growth:**

We are pleased to report that our membership for 2024 has welcomed eighteen new members. This growth reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive and inviting community.

**Visitor Engagement Initiatives:**

In an effort to enhance visitor experience, Gail has installed a new welcome visitor sign at the greeting table. After discussions with team members Jim Reay and Peggy Campbell, we decided to reposition the greeting table against the wall. This change allows visitors to approach the table more comfortably, eliminating the feeling of navigating a “barrier.”

**Simplified Registration Process:**

To streamline the sign-up process for new visitors, we have shortened the registration forms. We have removed the requirement for physical addresses and included a note explaining that the information provided will be used to send our Thursday announcements. This update will help keep new members informed about our events and opportunities for participation. Every new visitor that fills out a form is registered into Breeze and sent an email welcome letter with important information for contacting Pastor Karen and participating in groups.

**Volunteer Participation:**

Many congregation members have graciously volunteered to greet attendees each Sunday and assist in counting those present. This initiative reinforces our welcoming atmosphere and helps foster community connections.

**Membership Conversations:**

Interested visitors were encouraged to schedule an appointment with Pastor Karen for a meaningful conversation about the membership process. Following these discussions, new members were invited to sign the membership book and make a pledge, formalizing their commitment to our community.

**Informational Gatherings:**

Karen Richter has successfully conducted a couple of informational gatherings on Sundays prior to service. These sessions are aimed at providing interested visitors with insights into the membership process and our community's values, further enhancing their understanding and engagement.

**New Nametags:**

Due to the new UU logo, Jan Murphy, treasurer introduced a laminating machine for making nametags on site at a much more reasonable cost than having them made with a printing company.

**Upcoming Member Introduction:**

We are excited to announce that we will be including our new members in the service on December 29, 2024. This special occasion will provide an opportunity to formally introduce and welcome our twelve new 2024 members to the congregation.

Purpose: To celebrate and integrate new members into our congregation and provide a platform for them to connect with existing members.

**Next Steps:**

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these changes and seek feedback from both new members and established congregation members. Our focus remains on creating a welcoming environment that encourages participation and strengthens community ties.

Also, focusing on member retention by supporting and encouraging members to participate in classes, events, Sunday services, social justice events, the social hour, and committees offering them a strong feeling of belonging.

Due to Gail Manahan taking the Congregational Administrator position she is stepping down from the Membership Chair Position at the end of December 2024.

**Conclusion:**

The positive feedback we've received on these initiatives indicates that our efforts are making a significant impact. We look forward to nurturing growth within our faith community as we move into the new year.

**Music Committee Report  
Amelia Davis**

Music Committee Members:

New – Maria Runde

Continuing - Patricia Balfour, Sylvia Manalis, Amelia Davis Chair

Exiting – Barry Linden, Mary Anne Poggenburg

The Music Committee met a total of 5 times in 2024, much of the effort was spent planning and

coordinating the UUCS Concert Series, a new program created and coordinated by the Music

Committee bringing free concerts to the West Valley as a way of Stewardship to our congregation and musical community outreach.

- Assisting with the onboarding process for Luke Stikeleather, our new Music Director at UUCS who started in January 2024
- Planning & coordinating a Latin American Music Concert May 5, 2024 with Q'iru Duet of Nico Barbaren, Gloria Orozco Dorado and Eduardo Coronado. Contributed \$600 from the Special Music Fund. We had an At will donation during the concert and raised about \$696, which was split with the congregation and the musicians with \$348 going towards UUCS. Approximately 70 people were in attendance with about 20 from outside the congregation.
- Planning & coordinating Firebird String Quartet from ASU on May 19 th , 2024 consisting of Luke Stikeleather, Jonathan Kuehn, Hannah Shute, and Oliva Bolles. Contributed \$600 from the Special Music Fund. We had an At will donation during the concert and raised about \$855, which was split with the congregation and the musicians with \$427 going towards UUCS. There were approximately 70 people in attendance.
- Planning & Coordinating Luke's Violin Recital on December 8 th 2024 of which will pay \$300 for the accompanist playing piano for his concert which will come out of the Music Fund. The concert had approximately 70 people in attendance, many outside the congregation. We had at will donations during the concert and raised \$748, of which \$438 went towards Luke Stikeleather and \$310 went towards UUCS, covering the cost of the event.

Goals for 2025:

- Assist Music Director, as needed
- Schedule more Music Concert Series and help plan and coordinate
- Will host Jim Scott for a concert on January 12, 2025 at 2pm, which the committee has been assisting with planning and coordinating the concert. UUCS will cover the cost of the concert in the 2025 budget and we will take at-will voluntary donations that will be split 50/50 between Jim Scott and the congregation.

### **Questers Annual Report Juliet Gustavson**

The purpose of the Questers (Adult Enrichment) Committee is to serve as the leadership team for visioning and implementing an adult education program that affirms and promotes our values and principles, particularly growth through a personal search for truth and meaning and encouragement to spiritual growth.

Questers 15 2024 offerings included A Book Study—"Zealot: The Life & Times of Jesus of Nazareth", Awe: Intro to the Game Changer, Aging Checklist: Planning Now for Greater Healthspan, and Immigration: Some Realities.

There are two ways you can volunteer to be part of the Questers Adult Enrichment Program:

- Serve as a Questers Committee member – With Chair Juliet Gustavson's move, Questers is entering a new era with a new Chair, Carol Calkins. The committee is seeking new members for this rewarding volunteer opportunity.
- Volunteer to lead or facilitate a Questers Offering. *All but one of our 2024 offerings were led by UUCS volunteers.*

There are also three other ways you can be part of the Questers Adult Enrichment Program:

- Sign up for a Questers offering;
- Sign up for and bring a friend to a Questers offering;
- Offer ideas for possible Questers experiences.

Questers 2024 Committee: Carol Calkins, Juliet Gustavson,  
Jeff London, Sharon Moore

### **Stewardship Report Janet Jeffrey and Steve Calkins, Co-Chairs**

The members of the rest of the team are: Amelia Davis, Bill Hughes, Mandy Oviatt and Paige Rappleye. Board of Trustees President Brooke Gaunt and Pastor Karen Richter served on the team as an ex-officio members. The Stewardship Committee takes leadership for raising funds to support our congregation. The primary source of funds comes from members/friends who fulfill pledges each year. We need these pledges for: supplies and equipment used by programs, payment of professional and support staff, upkeep and maintenance of the building and grounds, and support for the activities of our congregation. In turn, we have wonderful facilities in which to meet and celebrate and where lay leaders create and lead programs, such as, the Questers, Men's and

Women's Groups, BUKK group, Social Justice Activities, Friendship Suppers, OWL, and the library. Pledged donations are the largest source of our funding. The pledge campaign is our primary commitment. In 2024, the ask for pledges was both in person and virtual (letters and emails). We did not meet the \$225,000 goal; pledges of \$167,519 for 2024 was lower than in past years. Some donated more than they pledged, some will not complete their pledges. Pledges for 2025 are the lowest in recent years at \$141,098 as of December 18, 2024. We hosted the auction in April 2024, as well as fund-raising events, such as coffee house, and food events (chili-cornbread). We support the music committee that has provided music events. We plan to continue to hold fund raising events in 2025. We hope some of you enjoyed the events in 2024 and will join us in 2025.

Our goals for 2025:

1. Sustainable financial support of UUCS by meeting pledge goal.
2. Developing sustainable structure for the major fundraising event that will include dinner, live auction, and entertainment.
3. Continue to support other events that raise funds

As Chairs, we are most grateful for our team's work and to all of you who provided donations to support the work of our congregation; it is this generosity that continues to build our community.