

**Minutes of 2024 Winter Congregational Meeting
Unitarian Church of Lincoln
Sunday, December 8, 2024**

The meeting began at 11:30 am.

Welcome

Welcome and announcements were read by Melody Vaccaro, Vice President of the Board of Trustees. She noted that two town halls were held and said that today we would hear from leadership on all major activities and decisions since the spring congregational meeting. If there are questions, please reach out to anyone on the Board of Trustees after the meeting.

Opening Words

Opening Words "In Our Circle Again" by Shari Woodbury were read by Peg Pelter, Board Member.

Chalice Lighting

Leslie Ryan, Board Member, lit the chalice and read "Chalice Lighting for the Work of the Congregation" by Erik Walker Wikstrom.

Congregational Singing

Shelly Fowler and other choir members led the congregation in singing "This Little Light of Mine".

Information on Voting and Quorum

Information about voting procedures (online and by paper ballot) and requirements for a quorum were read by Sue Goebel, Board Member. According to the bylaws, 20% of the membership constitutes a quorum. Currently, 20% is 56 members. Election results will be announced in the eblast on Friday, 12-13-24, and at the Sunday Service on 12-15-24.

Approval of Minutes of Spring 2024 Congregational Meeting

Floyd Wickenkamp, Board Secretary, requested approval of the minutes from the June 2, 2024, Spring Congregational Meeting.

Nominations Committee Report

JoAnn Lanning, Chair of the Nominations Committee, thanked Judy Hart for her service as she completes her term on the committee and announced the three nominees to fill that vacant position: Erica Birky-Rios; Priscilla Handy; and Mary Ann Meisner.

Program Council Report

The Program Council was represented by Kathy Disney filling in temporarily for Marcia Cederdahl, the Council Chair. In addition to the Chair, there are six Clusters that make up the Program Council: Facilities; Sunday Services; Adult Activities; Youth Activities; Congregation: and Outreach. The report covered what's been going on since the last congregational meeting.

Kathy announced that Patti Cuevas is the new representative on the Interfaith Housing Coalition Board and thanked Les Manns for his many years of service in that position.

She thanked Bob Egan for his many years of service as the Art Gallery Coordinator and announced that we have a new Art Gallery Committee consisting of Judy Hart, Phyllis Higley, Jim Atkins, and Jim Baker. More members may be added as they go along.

Thanks to Patti Cuevas as the outgoing Outreach Cluster leader, Angie Fass as the new Outreach Cluster leader, Judy Kelly as outgoing Adult Activities Cluster leader, Kay Hoff as outgoing Membership Committee Chair, and Michael Reinmiller for his many years as coordinator of the Fresh Start monthly dinners.

Kathy then gave brief highlights from each of the clusters.

The Facilities Cluster repainted stripes on the parking lot and built an enclosure for the fire sprinkler in the table storage room. The Kitchen Crew continued maintenance of the kitchen. The cluster helped to bring the building into compliance for the new daycare tenant. The Grounds Committee, along with many others, worked on resurfacing the playground with rubber tiles; the shade structure will be going up in the spring.

On the Sunday Services Cluster, the Worship Associates welcomed Rev. AJ and started to work together to provide quality worship experiences. The Choir is growing in participation. A/V installed a larger monitor in the back of the Sanctuary. Ushers, greeters, and pulpit decorators continue to make Sunday morning worship welcoming.

In the Youth cluster, Youth in Action meets regularly and recently sponsored a collection barrel for supplies for Baby and Me. The Religious Growth and Learning Committee is currently working with Chelsea on plans for the future of the RGL program.

In the Congregation Cluster, the Membership Committee held a Nuts & Bolts class for newcomers and others. UCL had a booth at PRIDE, did a Trans Day of Remembrance movie night, and continues to work on maintaining our Welcoming Congregation status. Card senders and Friendly Faces continue to connect us with those in need of comfort.

In the Outreach Cluster, the Social Justice Committee engaged in letter writing and phone bank work to get out the vote and organized volunteer efforts at the Center for People. The Green Sanctuary Committee organized and facilitated a very successful Climate Justice Revival with over thirty people participating in the weekend workshops.

Under Adult Activities Cluster, groups like Open Circles, UU Connects, Tai Chi, afternoon bridge groups, the women's book club, and men's & women's potlucks continue to be popular. Hidden highlights are our Helping Hands group, UCL's group of knitters. Working with a larger group located in Wahoo, within the last year they have made 200 layettes, which means 2200 items: 200 tote bags; 400 hats; 400 pairs of booties; 400 blankets; 400 washcloths; and 400 bibs. These layettes go to Women, Infants & Children (WIC) offices in rural Nebraska. They have recently started donating to WIC in Lincoln. Most of these items are handmade. Helping Hands and the group in Wahoo made about 200 winter items last year - hats, scarves, fingerless gloves - mostly contributed to the Stranger Share Our Fire service. They made 5-6 comfort shawls; they have extras that have not been donated as well. They made 65 washcloths for the Otoe-Missouria project. They made Christmas stockings and they donated items in the Handmade Harvest event.

There are many, many things going within the programs of the church. Read the newsletter and the eblasts to keep up.

And we need people - we need somebody to be the Adult Activities Cluster leader, we need somebody to do the Fresh Start monthly dinners, and we need ushers and coffee makers.

Minister's Report

Reverend AJ Galazen gave his report. Generally, he tries to organize his week with Monday being for reading, Tuesday for writing, Wednesday and Thursday for meetings and communicating, Friday as his Sabbath, Saturday as a “catch-up” day, and Sunday is church day.

He reminded us that his time here as interim Minister is specifically limited. In his four months here, he has been getting to know many of us. But in addition to work, this transition period is a time to slow down a bit and take time to listen to each other. It's okay to feel a little anxious now. People tend to become more involved when they understand the importance of the moment. But inaction is not an option. Some decisions need to be made and not all of us will agree on everything. And that's okay. Instead of living in an “either/or” world, we can try growing into a “both/and” mindset.

Over the next four months, the Transition Team will be hosting a series of transition town halls to focus on various areas of interest - domains of significant investment that are of great value to the congregation. The town halls are not a time to fix or complain or replace or change anything, but rather a chance to openly share viewpoints, ideas, and feelings with an understanding that business as usual may no longer be viable. Transparency builds trust. We'll also take into account surveys, focus groups, and committee recommendations.

Rev. Galazen encouraged anyone to seek out members of the Transition Team or himself for an individual appointment if confidentiality is desired. He encouraged attendance at one or more of the town halls. They will be held after the service on the second Sunday of the month, beginning in January with religious growth and learning. February's topic will be music. March will be about worship. April's topic will be pastoral care and right relations. In many ways the transition town halls are more about questions than answers, more about listening than planning, and more about wondering than knowing. He said we are right on course for our next transition. We all have a place here - members, friends, leadership, professional staff.

President's Report

Judy Hart, President of the Board of Trustees, reported on the major activities and decisions since the spring meeting.

June

In June, we said goodbye to the Sinclairs and the Bluestem Montessori School. Although there was sadness, excitement also filled our congregation as we embarked on a new chapter.

Section 11.6 of our bylaws requires that an external review of all fiscal operations be conducted every third year or when requested by the board. The last external review took place in 2018. The board appointed HBE CPAs & Consultants to conduct a review, which took place from June to August, focusing on fiscal year 2023. This required extensive hours from Jean Helms, who provided the necessary documentation while managing daily responsibilities as Admin Director of the church at three-quarter's time. Thanks to Jean for her efforts that enabled HBE to prepare the excellent report presented to the board on September 25. The report reflects positively on the office staff, as well as on the involvement of our Treasurer, Vice Treasurer, and Finance Team. We have a group of people that keep each person accountable - a remarkable system.

July

In July, we focused on strengthening relationships with our Indigenous friends. Board members were encouraged to read the book In the Interim.

The newly established Capital Investment Committee worked on defining its purpose as an educational and an investment-focused committee. The committee now has seven members and is meeting regularly. The balance of UCL's Vanguard investment funds is \$548,089.69 as of 11-30-24, which is a year-to-year increase of 25.7% or \$112,065.22. The balance of the Anniversary Fund is \$8,475.78. That fund is annual donations by members to celebrate the day when they joined the church. The money is used primarily by the Program Council for specific needs that aren't in the operational budget. Mark Shifler is in charge of the Anniversary Fund and chairs the CIC. The CIC will hold an educational forum early in 2025; details will be announced in Beacon articles.

August

In August, the Board, office staff and Building Committee (led by Harry Heafer) collaborated to request a variance from the city regarding the height of the fence surrounding our west-facing playground. This was a stumbling block in our pursuit of housing an early childhood care facility in our building. UCL was granted a special permit by the city on September 16 which clears the way for our new tenant to move into the building soon.

The resurfacing of the playground is nearly finished. Special thanks to Heather Hillhouse and Michael Straatmann from the Grounds Committee for their efforts in bringing this project to completion. In the spring, a shade structure will be added to the playground area, and the Grounds Committee will enhance the project with new plantings around the outside of the fence.

In August, we met Rev. AJ Galazen and our current chapter of interim ministry began.

Also in August, our treasurers, office staff, and annual giving team began a communication campaign to reach out to individuals who had pledged for 2024 but had not made any contributions yet to see if they were still able to complete their pledges. We also kicked off our 2025 annual giving campaign. Thanks to Elle Straatmann and Christine Davis for co-chairing the campaign.

The August board-sponsored lay leadership retreat was a vibrant gathering with discussions held focusing on key areas of worship, improving communication, developing innovative programming, and managing finances effectively. It was an inspiring opportunity to collaborate and share our aspirations.

Our church's participation in Justice in Action continued to grow. UCL has 117 network members, with 21 on various research teams: 3 on Adult Pretrial Diversion, 10 on Affordable Housing, and 8 on Mental Health Navigation. This fall, about 45 UCL individuals attended house meetings to officially become members of the network.

September

In September, board members from Omaha's First Unitarian Church visited Lincoln for a Sunday service and a lunch focused on relationship-building and information sharing. In early October the UCL board reciprocated with a trip to Omaha, attending First Unitarian's Sunday service and we continued conversations. Members of Omaha's Second Unitarian Church joined us for that meeting. Our next gathering is scheduled for December 15 on Zoom, and a spring meeting at Second Unitarian. It was good to meet with those folks in Omaha who are sharing the same questions and the same staffing issues.

In September, a transition team was formed to work closely with Rev. AJ during this interim period. Their work will be showcased over the next few months with surveys and transition town halls January through April.

October-November

Budget discussions started in October and continued into November as the annual giving campaign was underway. During our recent town halls, we discussed our draft budget, which includes funding a full-time Minister, a full-time Administrative Director, and a 15 hours/week Administrative Assistant. We're also restructuring three staff positions to better align our staffing with our needs. To achieve this, we're exploring the possibility of creating three part-time positions, each at 10 hours/week: a Membership Coordinator, a Music Coordinator; and a Family Ministry Coordinator. Our music and RGL programs will be the focus for the January and February transition town halls.

Treasurer's Report & Proposed 2025 Budget

Treasurer Jason Slaughter was unavailable so Vice Treasurer Karen Heafer read his report and provided additional comments.

We had a very productive year in the financial part of our church. We have talked a lot about where we are in the finances of the church and believe we have been very transparent on how we are doing.

As we close the fiscal year of 2024, we are sitting at 88% of our pledges fulfilled, which is a big difference from last year where we were at 82%. We are on track to fulfilling our pledges for this year.

We got rid of one utility bill this year - no more natural gas bill. Last year gas and electric was a total of \$8,383.93. This year, our total gas and electric expense is \$6,358.06. that is a total savings of a little over \$2,000 so far this year.

Regarding income, as of November 15, which was 88% of this year, we are at 89.3% of income, exactly where we need to be. One of the things we are seeing improvement on is more consistent pledge income and increase of our facility use.

Expenses as of November 15 are at 89.4% of our budget. Like last year, we are doing a great job of keeping it within our limits of spending what we have. We do a hard job to make sure we live within our means.

This year we had a financial review from HBE CPAs & Consultants. We're doing a great job in our processes. It was all done electronically so all the forms had to be gathered, uploaded, and sent. Thanks to Jean who worked with HBE to make sure they had all they needed.

Thanks to our team who led our annual giving campaign - Elle and Christine. They have also agreed to be our team for 2025.

This year, Judy Hart, Karen Heafer, and Jason Slaughter attended a learning session with the UUA on best practices for pledge campaigns. We look forward to showing you all the things we learned for next year's campaign. It will look different. Our campaign will not be just one month or a few weeks. It will be a lot longer period of time, multiple months

If you have any questions, let Jason know and he will make sure you get answers.

The 2025 budget was reviewed line-by-line at the town halls. Our total estimated income for 2025 is \$455,032. This represents pledge contributions as well as funds from prior year pledges postpaid, general donations, general goods and services, church facility use, and supplemental income. Our total estimated expenses are \$462,094. This represents budget requests from Program Council committees, utilities, our full-time minister, full-time Administrative Director, and staff to support new church structure. A reminder - with the new bylaws change, we are no longer required to have a balanced budget.

Some participants at the meeting raised objections about the lack of time for questions and answers on the budget. Judy Hart said we did that during the town halls and asked that

people talk to a board member after the meeting. There's the opportunity to vote no on the budget - it's a yes-no vote or you can abstain.

Responsive Reading

Allison Starr, Board Member, led the congregation in a responsive reading by George O'Dell titled "We Need One Another".

Extinguish Chalice

Rev. AJ Galazen read "This Chalice is Extinguished" by Rev. Brian Kiely.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:20 pm.

Addendum

Voting was open for 48 hours from Sunday, December 8, at 11:30 AM to Tuesday, December 10, at 11:30 AM. A quorum was reached with 109 voting members who:

Approved the spring congregational minutes (106 yes votes)

Elected Erica Birky Rios to the Nominations Committee

Adopted the proposed 2025 operating budget (99 yes votes)