

**UNITARIAN CHURCH OF LINCOLN  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2023-2024**



Prepared by Jean Helms for the  
**Spring Congregational Meeting**  
June 2, 2024

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**Unitarian Church of Lincoln Spring Congregational Meeting  
Sunday, June 2, 2024 \* 11:30AM**

Welcome	Kim Ziemann
Opening Words	Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair
Chalice Lighting	Melody Vaccaro
Singing with Congregation	Julie Enersen
Winter Congregational Meeting Minutes	Meg Mering
Treasurer's Report	Jason Slaughter
Voting Instructions	Allison Starr
Board of Trustees Candidates	Elle Straatmann
Share the Plate Nominees	Judy Hart
Unsung UU Award	Peg Pelter
Program Council Report	Marcia Cederdahl
President's Report	Kim Ziemann
Minister's Report	Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair
Closing Words	Kim Ziemann
Extinguish Chalice	Allison Starr
Adjourn	

**Unitarian Church of Lincoln Winter Congregational Meeting  
December 10, 2023  
Meeting Minutes**

Kim Ziemann, the Board of Trustees President, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting. She thanked those in person and those online for joining in this important work of the Church. She asked all present Board members to join her at the front of the sanctuary and anyone else who previously served on the Board or served as Treasurer or served on the Program Council to stand or raise their hands to be recognized. She thanked them for serving as leaders of the Church.

The Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair provided the opening words written by Layla Ibrahim.

Julie Enersen led the congregation in singing.

Kim reminded the congregation that they would hear reports and have an opportunity to ask questions. She encouraged everyone to keep in mind the Church's Covenant of Right Relations.

### **Voting Instructions**

Allison Starr reviewed what the congregation would be voting on and the voting procedures. After the congregation meeting, congregants voted on the 2023 Spring Congregational meeting minutes, to fill the two vacant Nominations Committee positions, and the adoption of the 2024 budget and the bylaw revision. The bylaw revisions required a 2/3 vote to approve. The other items on the ballot required a majority vote. A quorum is needed. We reported 250 members to the UUA in January. According to the bylaws, 20% of the membership constitutes a quorum. This was counted by the number of votes received. Because of the meeting's multi-platform format, voting was done by virtual ballot. The ballot went live on December 10. Paper ballots were also available. In order to be counted, ballots had to be received by the church office no later than December 12 at 11:30 am. Results went out as part of the December 15's eblast.

### **Nominations Committee**

Elle Straatmann explained the purpose of the Nominations Committee. The elected members of the committee help identify candidates for the Nominations Committee, the Board of Trustees, and the Program Council chair and assist other groups as asked to do so.

Congregants voted for two new members of the Nominations Committee. The candidates were Shelly Fowler, JoAnn Lanning, and Diane Richards.

## **2023 Spring Congregational Meeting Minutes**

Congregants voted on approving the 2023 Spring Congregation Meeting minutes.

Meg Mering asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes. None were received.

## **Lincoln Unitarian Foundation Report**

Duncan Case provided the LUF report. He is a former Treasurer of the Church and the current LUF Treasurer.

The purpose of LUF is to acquire and manage financial assets for the Church. These funds are separate from the annual Church budget. As of November 1, the current value of the funds is \$401,181. LUF is responsible for investing these assets, so as to maintain and to optimize their value. Vanguard is the company that LUF works with for investments. The primary purpose of the fund is not to support the Church's budget but rather to support significant repair, improvement, or construction of Church property. For example, this year LUF funded the replacement of the gas HVAC system for the sanctuary and gallery with a new air source heat pump. The cost was \$48,525.

Disbursement of funds is a collaborative responsibility of the Board of Trustees and LUF. Both vote on disbursement requests. If the amount requested exceeds 5% of the value of the current budget, it is voted on by the congregation. The holdings of LUF are divided into restricted (\$64,474) and unrestricted (\$336,707) funds. Restricted funds have a specific purpose on how they are to be spent. Cole Music Fund is an example. Dyer fund is another example. It will be closed out at the end of the year. Sorenson fund provides money for lectures. The Designated Fund Index and the Designated Money Market are unrestricted.

### *Discussion*

Alan Worth asked if there was any consideration of using LUF funds instead of furloughing staff. Jason Slaughter stated that LUF funds were not intended for this use. Pledges and what is currently seen in the budget are what can be used.

BJ Wheeler said, if she is correct, that the Church invests only in what we believe in. Duncan said the Church has avoided investing in funds that do not reflect our beliefs. The Church also tries to keep the value of the funds up.

John Atkeison asked which document covers the restrictions of the use of funds by LUF and how those restrictions be changed if it becomes necessary. Emily Shattil, Chair of LUF, stated that this information is covered in the LUF Resolution and Plan of Operation document. It was last amended in June 2022. It is signed by LUF and the Board of Trustees. It can be amended with the signatures of both entities. LUF has prepared a plain-language version of the document.

Vanguard was sold earlier in December. The question was asked if LUF was comfortable with this change and if the current Vanguard advisor would continue to work with LUF. LUF will investigate this recent change with Vanguard.

Joanna Fink asked if there was an endowment for the Church. Oscar Sinclair said an endowment has a legal definition. There are ways LUF looks like an endowment in that, for example, the funds are primarily for capital expenses. LUF and the Board of Trustees had discussions about establishing an endowment.

Harry Heafer, a former member of LUF, restated that the LUF funds are to be used for to support significant repair, improvement, or construction of Church property. For this reason, LUF was established. It never has had its own non-profit status. It has always been part of the Church. Harry does not disagree that LUF funds cannot act as an emergency gap at the end of the year. He would not feel comfortable using it to make up a deficit for operations.

Tom Winter asked if there were any plans to have LUF be an actual foundation and to have a separate IRS standing. Emily Shattil said currently LUF is a standing committee of the Church. There are no current plans to change that. Most foundations have a lot more money than LUF. In the past, LUF investigated becoming and decided against it because of the fees that would have to be paid.

Kim Ziemann reported that LUF sends out letters on the anniversary of people joining the Church which encourages them to donate money to the Anniversary Fund. The current balance of the Anniversary Fund is \$8,451.

From the live chat, Linda commented, "We reevaluated our investments two years ago for social responsibility. We decided that we could live with our investments with good conscience."

### **Treasurer's Report**

Jason Slaughter provided the Treasurer's report.

Jason described the Church's finances as stable. The Church pays its bills and is debt-free.

At 93% of the way through the year, income is at 84.5% of the budget. Pledges have been steady most of the year. In the past several months, the pledges have slowed down.

In terms of expenses, the Church is 91% of the budget. We have not been overspending. We are fiscally responsible.

The Church is expecting \$466k in income this year, which is down from our 3-year average of \$501k. This required tough decisions. Many expense lines have increased due to inflation. To balance the budget for 2024, cuts were made to 35 line items, including cuts to staff salaries and program areas.

Since Jason became treasurer this past summer, the Finance Team has had two meetings.

Karen Heafer is the Vice Treasurer.

Next year, the Church will have a financial review. The cost of the review will be around \$7,000.

Jason thanked Judy Kelly for her leadership in the annual giving campaign.

Jason prepares a financial report every month which is available to all Church members.

### *Discussion*

Alan Worth asked if it is possible to offer amendments to the budget. Kim Ziemann stated that the congregants would be voting on the budget as it stands. Should income change, the Board of Trustees would meet to decide how to spend that additional income. Alan felt the congregation not being able to offer amendments was inconsistent with describing the Church as being democratically run. Jason said the budget is discussed and worked on during the Board of Trustees' business meetings. Congregants are welcome to attend these meetings. The budget has been available for review. Kim said the Town Halls are a place for suggestions, discussion, and questions.

Evelyn Weymouth said she had attended both Town Halls. The budget is trying to match the money the Church actually has coming in. In the past, the Church has relied on second asks for money at pledge time. It is time to stop doing that. The Church needs to live within the pledges it has. In order to do this, painful decisions had to be made.

Oscar spoke to Alan's question about democracy. We come out of a tradition of democracy during congregational meetings. It is challenging to make amendments when the meetings are hybrid. Democracy does not just happen in this meeting and this vote. It also happens when congregants elect Board of Trustees members. When you gather in your clusters and select a member to serve as the liaison on the Program Council and when you call a minister are other examples. The first meetings of working on the budget were in July. They involved church leaders whom the congregation has elected. In August, the Program Council made budget requests to the Board. In September, a Stewardship campaign was launched. In October, the Board of Trustees sponsored a forum on the budget where the first draft of the budget was part of the discussion. In November, the Board was looking at how that draft was going to interact with the real income. The Church had two town halls and the congregational meeting. It is a culmination of a demographic process. You cannot separate everything that led up to this vote.

Harry Heafer asked about the Church's membership to Justice in Action. He wondered how this amount was established and if the Church was getting its money worth. With that money, the Church could have funded the AV position. Harry recognized being part of Justice in Action does fit the Church's values. Oscar said Justice in Action took three years to get fully off the ground. Twenty-three congregations across Lincoln are currently part of it. It is working toward increasing mental health care, pre-trial diversion, and affordable housing in the city. When Oscar came to this Church seven years ago, the congregation said it wanted to be a partner in the community and wanted the Church to be known in the community as a church that was involved in the community. Oscar was selected as the minister in part because he was a trained community organizer. In setting up Justice in Action, 24 representatives, including Oscar, were selected to establish the financial model. The organization has two professional organizers. The money from what the Church contributes partly pays for these salaries. The amount of the contribution is 1% of the Church's income. The Unitarians are the rock of the organization. Our credibility is on the line if we were to pull that money. Oscar has put his

personal and professional credibility into the organization. He has just been elected co-president of the organization.

Jason remarked the Church needed to get to a number for the budget. It has a realistic number. It is not easy to hear. It is reality. He appreciates the hard questions.

Oscar responded to the following comment in chat, "We value our staff more than someone's pride?" He felt the comment was likely directed at him. Yes, Oscar admitted to saying that not supporting Justice in Action would put his professional credibility on the line. He said that it is also the case that partnerships are what this congregation called him to the Church to do. This work is not being done at the expense of the staff. Oscar is one of the staff being furloughed.

Priscilla Handy said when Justice in Action was originally being organized, some thought the Unitarian Church could not necessarily be relied upon. She felt pulling out of the organization now would be confirmation that we are "flaky" and not dependable. The congregation told Oscar that we wanted to be involved in Justice in Action.

Karen Heafer said some members of the congregation completed a volunteer form. This is where we can help the Church. Karen is a Dazzler and she has already been given work that staff will not be able to do.

Christine Davis said before the pandemic, the congregation decided to move to two Sunday services. Not too long ago, we had plans to build a new sanctuary. A number of plans have had to be rethought because of what is going on in the world. Christine believes we exist because of more things outside of the Church building. The real responsibility beyond pledging in this community is to welcome more people into our community. We also need to be innovative and creative. Perhaps, we can create new revenue streams. The Church's financial problems, hopefully, are short-term.

## **Board President's Report**

Kim Ziemann presented her report.

As documented in the Church's bylaws, one of the major responsibilities of the Board is to create a budget and to ensure that the Church's expenditures stay within budget. We have to be realistic about our finances and make sound business decisions for the financial health and the longevity of the Church. As discussed in the Town Hall, the Church has changed greatly in the past few years. COVID-19 has impacted the Church in many ways. The Church's members and attendance at services have decreased. The work of the minister, Church leaders, and staff during the pandemic is greatly appreciated. Emergency funding was used during this time. As the Church emerges from the pandemic, we have experienced loss and change, which is hard and brings grief. Seeing the 2024 budget for the first time brought shock, loss, and grief. The Church is starting anew and stepping forward. The Board had to consider what size of staff the Church can afford. On the other side of grief can be hope, renewed strength, and new direction. It is one of the reasons we are exploring our vision and mission by redefining who we are and where we want to be as a church. The Church community has shown over the past six months and before that, it shows up to do that hard work.

Since Kim became President of the Board of Trustees in June, the Church has accomplished much. New members of the Board were elected. Jason Slaughter was approved as the



Treasurer. Karen Heafer was approved as the Vice Treasurer. The finance and personnel handbooks were updated. The Church sent delegates to the General Assembly. The return of the minister and his family was celebrated with a picnic potluck in July. The Bylaws Taskforce led by Judy Hart continued to meet. A team was formed to explore the Church's vision and mission. The Board voted for an overdue financial review. The stewardship ministry met to plan for the annual giving campaign and to explore other stewardship opportunities. The Board began budget discussions in the summer. The Board developed four priorities for the Church year. Aligning staff and ministerial salaries with UUA suggested midpoint guidelines. Implementing a funding plan for building and grounds sustainability. Increasing involvement and engagement across all parts of the congregation and strengthening volunteer leadership. Expanding collaborative effects on human rights advocacy including but not limited to Justice in Action. Oscar was recently elected co-president of Justice in Action. On September 10, the annual giving campaign had its kick-off with a potluck. Board members encouraged congregants to have conversations about special memories of the Church and why the Church was important to them. The Church hosted the Otoe-Missouria delegation in September. The Bylaws Taskforce prepared to present the revised bylaws to the Congregation. The October 22, Sunday Service was hosted by Board members. 501(c) (3) status went into effect for the Church. Board members met with leaders of the Omaha Unitarian churches and hope to continue that partnership. The Executive Board comprised of the Board President, Vice President, Treasurer, Vice Treasurer, Program Council Chair, and Minister met multiple times to work on the budget. The Second Chance Auction was a huge success thanks to Karen Heafer, Barbara Pearson, and all the people who donated and bid on items. The auction made \$6,700. The Board planned and had two Town Meetings and this meeting.

### **Minister's Report**

The Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair presented his minister's report.

Traditionally, the minister of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln delivers two reports in the year. Because Oscar was on sabbatical the first half of the year, this report was his first one in twelve months.

When Oscar last reported in December 2022, he was finishing up his doctor of ministry degree including writing a thesis based on an oral history project. In May 2023, Oscar graduated from Wesley Theological Seminary. His thesis is completed. It is available to anyone who would like to read it. During the spring, he spent five months on sabbatical in the United Kingdom living at Unitarian Congregational Church in Bessels Green. He preached twice a month. It was interesting seeing a Unitarian Church in a post-religious society. Sevenoaks Unitarian is one of the largest and most thriving congregations in southern England. They have fifteen members. The UK demographic trends are approximately thirty years ahead of the United States. How will the United States transition into a post-religious society? What are the adjustments we can make now? In the UK, they had large endowments.

Returning to Lincoln, Oscar found the Church doing some great things including Justice in Action. It was also facing some real challenges. Church attendance is down from where it was in 2019 .... from twelve months ago. Where are we now? The Unitarian Church of Lincoln is getting caught up in trends larger than us as a congregation. UUA released numbers showing religious education attendance is down 40% in the last six years. The question is how we do things differently in a world that has fundamentally different needs. That has required some

hard steps. Difficult budget discussions. It allows us to stabilize now so that we are ahead of the cultural change. We are doing it on purpose so that we are reacting to it. It is painful.

This church remains extraordinary. It is vibrant and happy. It is involved and launching stuff. Seven years ago, the church said it wanted to be a beacon of liberal religion in the city. We want to be people who show up. Beloved Conversations which the UUA launched. We sent more people than the UUA knew how to handle. We kept people involved until there was no more curriculum. The Church has gotten involved in the indigenous community here. We host the Otoe-Missouria delegation. It looks like they will be coming up once a year. It was amazing to watch the fight for access for health care for trans teens in Lincoln which members of this congregation were involved in. We figured out how to do worship in different ways. We have a live stream. We figured it out fast and well. We weathered the pandemic. We wrote a covenant. We married and buried people. We host groups ... Bluestem Montessori ... the Lincoln Music Teachers Association ... Lincoln Chamber Players. Oscar is now the longest-tenured Unitarian minister in Nebraska and Iowa. There is one minister in Kansas who has been there one year longer than Oscar.

### **Closing Words**

Mary K Stillwell provided closing words.

### **Extinguish Chalice**

Kim Ziemann extinguished the chalice.

### **Adjourn**

### **Addendum**

Election results were announced on December 15.

106 members voted with three voting by paper ballot. Voting was open for 48 hours from Sunday, December 10 at 11:30AM to Tuesday, December 12 at 11:30AM.

JoAnn Lanning and Shelly Fowler were elected to the Nominations Committee.

Church members also:

- Approved the 2023 Spring Congregational Meeting Minutes YES VOTES 98%,
- Amended our Bylaws YES VOTES 97%, and
- Adopted the Proposed 2024 Operation Budget YES VOTES 94%.

## Board of Trustees Candidates' Full Bios

### Sue Goebel

#### **Current and/or past involvement and experiences in the Unitarian Church of Lincoln:**

- Member since 1987
- Raised two children in the church
- Religious Growth and Learning chair, teacher
- Worship and Celebration Committee
- Liaison between RGL and the Board of Trustees
- Church Kitchen Cleaning Crew
- Random other volunteer efforts

**My goals for the future of the church if elected:** To paraphrase William Faulkner's vision for mankind: This church should "not only survive, but prevail." I would like to lend my efforts to further that goal. We must not lose sight of our principles.

#### **Some personal information about myself:**

- Nebraska born and raised as a liberal Christian
- Science teacher's daughter
- Married to a Nigerian Yoruba man for two decades, two kids
- BFA in Art, two years of computer science major course work
- Worked mostly at UNL offices
- Live at Cotner Center, was on the board of directors for eight years and, together with a former branch bank manager, helped keep the office running for months during an employee search

### Leslie D. Ryan

#### **Current and/or past involvement and experiences in the Unitarian Church of Lincoln:**

I've been a church member since 2001, and I served on the Board of Trustees many years ago. • I'm currently the organizer for the 6300 Dinner Club, and I participate in an active Open Circle group each month. • In the past, I've taught OWL (Our Whole Lives) as part of the church's Religious Growth and Learning Program. • I've occasionally been seen in the church kitchen serving coffee.

**My goals for the future of the church if elected:** The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, like many churches, is facing difficult times. Staff and budget constraints, declining attendance, and an aging sanctuary are some obvious issues. But I believe we have a strong congregation and a

very visible presence in the community. My goal for board service would be to strengthen, protect, and grow the religious community I value, rather than to advocate for any particular issue or agenda. In 20-plus years, I've seen church structures and issues come and go, but my hope is that this church is still strong and healthy 20-plus years from now.

**Some personal information about myself:**

I've had multiple and diverse professional careers, ranging from federal Immigration Services Officer to Medicaid Research Analyst. I worked for Planned Parenthood for a while, and I've been a Medical Editor. I raised my kids in this church. Right now, I volunteer for several non-profits in Lincoln, and I belong to a rather eclectic book club.

**Michael Straatmann**

**Current and/or past involvement and experiences in the Unitarian Church of Lincoln:** I have been a member of the church since 2015 and currently serve as co-chair of the Grounds Task Force. I have served in a number of positions throughout the church, including a transitional role on the Management Team as we adopted/transition to the Program Council model. I have served as a cluster leader for the Facilities group to the Program Council and on the Facilities committee. Previously, within the church I have been active as a RGL volunteer and have also been involved with a number of committees/groups/projects over my time within the congregation.

**My goals for the future of the church if elected:** My goals for a possible term on the board would be to continue the strong leadership previously demonstrated by our elected leaders as we move deeper into a period of profound transition. The trends in membership, activity and general demographics are clearly manifesting themselves in many areas, most notably the financial position of the church. It is imperative that we work within the burgeoning restraints to continue to fulfill our mission and search for ways to ensure continued growth for the community.

**Some personal information about myself:**

My current professional position is as the Associate Director of Collection Management for the University of Nebraska Libraries, where I oversee the physical collections of the largest library in the State of Nebraska. I am active in a variety of statewide and regional work with libraries and archives. I have previously served as the Executive Director of the Nebraska Library Association for over 7 years, providing leadership and support of a non-profit organization. In that role, I developed an understanding of many aspects of non-profit board work, including operations/administration, advocacy, volunteer coordination, finance, strategic planning, and fundraising. I currently teach "Library Administration and Management" as adjunct faculty for Central Community College where I create and deliver curriculum based on many of those same skillsets to help create leaders in a non-profit/community service-based profession.

**2024/2025 SHARE THE PLATE Nominations**  
**(in the order in which they were received)**

1. *Baby and Me*
2. *Mourning Hope Grief Center*
3. *Hope Village*
4. *Planned Parenthood*
5. *Malone Center*
6. *ACLU of Nebraska*
7. *ARC of Lincoln*
8. *BraveBe Child Advocacy Center*
9. *Bridges to Hope*
10. *Center for Legal Immigration Assistance (CLIA)*
11. *ECHO Collective*
12. *Lincoln Literacy*
13. *Willie's Underwear Project*
14. *Some of Us For All of Us*
15. *Center for People*
16. *Community Crops*
17. *Food Bank of Lincoln*
18. *Indian Center*
19. *Nebraska for Alternatives to Justice*
20. *Asian Community and Cultural Center*
21. *League of Women Voters*
22. *The Bay*
23. *Little Free Pantry at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln*
24. *OutNebraska*
25. *NAACP - Lincoln Branch*

### **1. Baby & Me**

**Nominator(s): Chelsea Krafka**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Baby & me is a local non-profit which serves working parents who are on leave. There is a gap in the community where there are working parents trying to work to get by but make too much for assistance. A lot of parents do not have access to any paid leave and return back to work sooner than they want due to finances. Baby & Me will help parents by providing them with diapers, wipes, grocery gift cards, and a postpartum wellness gift basket for the first 4-6 weeks of being home with their newborn.

### **2. Mourning Hope Grief Center**

**Nominator(s): Linda Ager and Alan Worth**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Mourning Hope offers bereaved children, adults and families the comfort, understanding and companionship they need to find a way forward. Mourning Hope's services are available at absolutely no costs and no one is ever turned away. They rely solely on private donations from individuals, businesses, service clubs and foundations. Mourning Hope offers peer-based grief support groups that help participants find hope and connection. This includes family groups for children, teens and caregivers, young adult groups (ages 19 - 30ish), Adult groups for ages 30+, survivors of suicide groups and school based groups.

### **3. HOPE VILLAGE**

**Nominator(s): Linda Ager**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Hope Village will be 250 to 500 square feet homes primarily for people who have been justice involved, but can be for homeless vets and other homeless people. The rent will be \$1.00 per square foot, so truly affordable. There is no time limit to how long a person can live there, as long as they can pay rent and their utilities. It will be built right across 27th Street from the Matt Talbot Kitchen.

### **4. PLANNED PARENTHOOD**

**Nominator(s): Linda Brown**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Planned Parenthood of Lincoln offers a full range of high-quality sexual health care services without judgment.

### **5. MALONE CENTER**

**Nominator(s): Linda Brown, Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

The vision of the Malone Center is to create unity and prosperity throughout Lincoln while honoring our African American heritage. The Malone Center has a staff of 50 providing services in support and outreach, education, youth leadership and youth athletics. Serves neighboring families, youth, and the Lincoln community with inclusive, social, cultural, educational, employment, and welfare services. Works to eliminate multi-generational poverty in Lincoln while honoring our African American heritage.

### **6. ACLU NEBRASKA**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

The ACLU of Nebraska works in courts, legislatures, and communities to protect the constitutional and individual rights of all people.

### **7. ARC OF LINCOLN**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

The Arc of Lincoln is a non-profit advocacy organization that serves people of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

#### **8. BRAVE BE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer, Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

BraveBe Child Advocacy Center is a non-profit organization providing a safe, child friendly location for conducting forensic interviews and medical evaluations for abused children in Southeast Nebraska.

#### **9. BRIDGES TO HOPE**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer, Jackie Kehl**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Serves and encourages men and women transitioning back into the community after incarceration as they become successful contributors to society. Provides basic household furnishings, clothing, personal hygiene products. Works with organizations to provide job training and mentoring.

#### **10. CENTER FOR LEGAL IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE (CLIA)**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Helping immigrants and refugees achieve their dream by providing high quality legal immigration assistance and mental health services.

#### **11. ECHO COLLECTIVE**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer, Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

ECHO Collective connects and empowers refugee and immigrant women by providing opportunities for personal growth and building cross-cultural relationships in a nurturing environment. ECHO Collective helps refugee and immigrant women overcome the barriers that they face in rebuilding their lives in the United States. Our entrepreneurship and creative programs focus on sparking connections that surpass language, and our desire is to see every refugee and immigrant confidently call Lincoln "home."

#### **12. LINCOLN LITERACY**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Help people in our community learn English language and job skills.

#### **13. WILLIE'S UNDERWEAR PROJECT**

**Nominator(s): Harry Heafer**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Providing underwear and sweatpants and t-shirts and socks to school nurses and counselors for when a student is ill at school or has an accident and needs a change of clothes to be able to return to class.

#### **14. SOME OF US FOR ALL OF US**

**Nominator(s): Julie Enersen**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Screamers Restaurant, because "talent is distributed equally but opportunity is not." SomeAll pays for lessons, instruments and dance gear for underprivileged children ages 5-17 in Lincoln so that finances are not a barrier to their participation in performing arts training.

### **15. CENTER FOR PEOPLE**

**Nominator(s): Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Our mission is to provide services and programs to our low-income community here in Lincoln that address basic needs and provide opportunities to achieve economic independence. We've witnessed a lot of change in our 20+ years. It started with our founder's vision of fighting food insecurity and grew from there – to bigger quarters, game-changing partnerships. Today we enter our second 20 years with the mission and the means to help all our neighbors reach their long-term goals for economic independence.

### **16. COMMUNITY CROPS**

**Nominator(s): Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of the Nominee**

Community Crops provides education, advocacy and experiences to grow local food. As a program of Family Service Lincoln, Community Crops empowers people to grow food through education, experiences and resources.

### **17. FOOD BANK OF LINCOLN**

**Nominator(s): Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

Strives to alleviate hunger in Southeast Nebraska. Serves 16 counties where an estimated 48,100 people are food insecure.

### **18. INDIAN CENTER**

**Nominator(s): Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

To provide value to the American Indian community by creating and obtaining programs that empower self-sufficiency and positive quality of life standards in individuals and families.

### **19. NEBRASKANS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO JUSTICE**

**Nominator(s): Social Justice Committee**

**Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

An association of community groups and prison-based groups offering experiential workshops in personal growth and creative conflict management.

### **20. ASIAN COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL CENTER**

**Nominator(s): Jackie Kehl**

**Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

Supports and empowers all refugees and immigrants through programs and services and advances the sharing of Asian cultures and the other cultural heritages of our clients with the community at large.

### **21. LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**

**Nominator(s): Judy Kelly**

**Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has merged its Education Fund with the organization and the combined is a 501(c)3.



## **22. THE BAY**

**Nominator(s): Laura Lee Woodruff**

### **Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

In addition to being a skate and skateboard park, coffee shop and art house, The Bay engages youth through peer support and mentorship via experiential STEAM and physical education; sponsors Bay High, a focus program partnership with Lincoln Public Schools; and provides 8 month Gap Year programming designed to help youth plan for their futures with industry knowledge, skills and paid internships.

## **23. LITTLE FREE PANTRY (at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln)**

**Nominator(s): Jean Helms, Carol Kendrick**

### **Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

The money raised through Share the Plate would be used to purchase non-perishable foods and other household items in bulk to be distributed through our pantry at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln (UCL). The beauty of the Little Free Pantries are that they are open 24/7/365 throughout neighborhoods in Lincoln.

## **24. OUTNEBRASKA**

**Nominator(s): Jake Lozier, Jean Helms**

### **Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

From the website:

"We believe in a Nebraska that embraces and celebrates the full spectrum of LGBTQIA2S+ people. Often, LGBTQIA2S+ Nebraskans experience discrimination, disparities, and isolation – particularly transgender people and people of color. OutNebraska is dedicated to empowering, celebrating, and growing LGBTQIA2S+ communities in Nebraska.

For more than 10 years we've been making an impact by advocating, celebrating and educating to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ people.

- We're advocating for reform, connecting with local and state representatives, encouraging civic engagement and making investments for the betterment of our communities.
- We're growing connections, lifting up our allies and celebrating LGBTQ+ people through fun events like the Prairie Pride Film Festival.
- We're providing inclusivity training and engaging in community conversations to help ensure a welcoming and thriving environment for all."

## **25. NAACP LINCOLN BRANCH**

**Nominator(s): Jackie Egan, Judy Kelly, Frank Edler**

### **Purpose/Mission of Nominee**

Every spring, the NAACP, Lincoln Branch grants Community Service Scholarships of varying amounts to Lincoln high school graduating seniors who will attend a post-secondary accredited institution. To be eligible, you must have a grade point average of 2.5 or above and be a current member of the NAACP Youth Council. Applicants must demonstrate a record of service to members of their local community documented by letters of recommendations. There is no restriction as to the field of study and the scholarship is open to all regardless of race, gender, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

Since the founding of the Lincoln chapter of the NAACP, the Unitarian Church of Lincoln has been a strong supporter of the organization and its good work in our community. In fact, our past minister, Arthur Weatherly, was instrumental in the foundation of the group's local chapter.

The Church continues to share NAACP goals to ensure the social, economic, educational, and political equality of all people through the democratic process and to eliminate discrimination and prejudice wherever it is found.

# 2024 Minister's Report

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

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## Narrative

### Process Note

This is my final annual report to the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. On April 21, I accepted a call to serve as senior minister at Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul Minnesota, starting August 1, 2024. The transitions process, including an introduction of incoming interim senior minister Rev. A.J. Galazen, is detailed elsewhere in the annual report. This section of the report will be divided into two sections: the first reporting on my work during the 2023-24 congregational year, and the second taking a longer look at the arc of our shared ministry from 2017-24.

### 2023-24 Annual Report

At the September 2023 Board of Trustees meeting, I laid out six areas of congregational life I anticipated would become major projects during this congregational year: worship, membership, bylaws, stewardship (with subsequent implications for staffing), Justice in Action, and our mission and vision. Over the last nine months each has taken center stage at different times:

#### *Worship*

In October 2023, I led a five-session adult education program on constructing worship, beginning with a sermon idea and progressing through writing a sermon and developing other parts of a worship service. The program was well-attended, and several of the services that participants developed were eventually part of Sunday morning worship this year. We also developed some new processes on the back end of worship, integrating weekly orders of service into our primary planning document, and moving the creation of the weekly slideshow to the Administrative Director's portfolio. This spring, long time Worship Associates chair Jaime Radcliffe finished his time in that role, with Kathy Disney stepping in as the new chair of the Worship Associates.

#### *Membership*

Several external events affected our membership program this year. UCL lost our membership associate position in the budget cuts the congregation voted on at the December meeting. At the same meeting, a change in the bylaws opened up the definition of membership – defining membership through support of UCL's mission and vision, rather than a financial pledge. We have added 14 new members since January 1, one of the largest cohorts of new members since 2016. How the congregation will

integrate these new members and continue to reach out to visitors from the community in the absence of a dedicated staff person will be an area of continued work in the coming year.

### *Bylaws*

UCL's last major bylaws revision took place in 2017-18, and our bylaws require that we consider changes every five years. The 2023 revisions focused on simplifying the congregation's bylaws, using plain language whenever possible and removing repetitive and unused bylaws. These revisions were voted on by the congregation at the December 2023 congregational meeting, after a year long process of revision and discernment.

### *Stewardship*

Stewardship was a primary theme of the first half of this congregational year. From 2020-2022, as the congregation responded to the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic, we engaged in three supplemental pledge drives, as well as seeking pandemic relief funding as a bridge in some uncertain years. In the 2023 pledge drive, we set out to establish a baseline of the congregation's income moving forward, without secondary asks or outside funding. The pledge drive was successful, in that we received more pledges of financial support than we have any year I have served in Lincoln. Unfortunately, because of inflation and the intentional lack of a second ask, the board was left with a \$50,000 gap between income and expenses for the 2024 budget. While we were able to make up some of that gap through cuts to programming, it required significant cuts to staff hours, detailed in the next subsection.

### *Staffing*

Based on sustained annual budget shortfall over the past three years, the congregation made the following permanent cuts to hours for staff positions in the 2024 budget:

- Religious Growth and Learning Director 40 hrs → 30 hrs
- Administrative Director, 40 hrs → 30 hrs
- Music Director, 20 hrs → 15 hrs
- Membership Coordinator, 10 hrs → 0 hrs

In addition, I agreed to a one-time, three-month furlough without pay over the course of 2024. The first month of furlough was April, the second July, the third would have been a month in the fall. Overall, this represents the loss of approximately one full time equivalent position, spread out across multiple departments. A description of how those hour cuts affected staff portfolios is available in the March Newsletter, linked here: [March 2024 Beacon](#).

### *Justice in Action*

The congregation's work with Justice in Action over the last year has been a bright spot. In October, I was elected co-president of the coalition of 24 churches and religious communities in Lincoln, working to expand access to pre-trial diversion, mental health care, and affordable housing in Lancaster County. It has been amazing to watch members of this congregation take multiple leadership roles in Justice in Action, working in partnership with other communities that do not share our theology but do share our commitment to justice. Our Nehemiah Assembly in May, which gathered 1,200 people of faith (including 167 Unitarians) to present concrete proposals to public officials was thrilling. Several days later, the [Lincoln Journal Star ran an editorial](#), which concluded:

*“Justice in Action is ultimately more than a group pointing out problems. They are offering solutions, including, for example, a public education campaign to reduce the stigma around mental health and creating a mediation process for those facing eviction. Local officials should not only open their ears but look seriously at these ideas.*

*The coalition also should be commended for bringing together people of different faiths and backgrounds who can unite behind these common causes. In our increasingly polarized world, these groups served as an example of how unity — not division — can spur action.”*

### *Mission and Vision*

This is one area of congregational life that I was not able to spend as much time on as anticipated this year. Part of that is operational: other things often took priority, and this important-but-not-urgent work often ended up on the back burner. Additionally, it is good and appropriate work for a congregation to engage in during an interim ministry, so once it became clear that this might be my last year with UCL, I stopped pushing this work forward.

### **Reflections on Transition**

This was not the year that I imagined leaving the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. There is still work to be done here, and while I am excited about the next steps for me and for UCL, I hold some grief that those steps will not be together. The [sermon on May 5](#) and the June newsletter both contain more information about the reasons for my departure. Briefly: they are varied, including family circumstances, finances, a unique opportunity, and a large helping of prayer and personal discernment. I am excited at the challenge to serve in St. Paul. I am sad to leave Lincoln. In some ways it is no more complicated than that.

The transition is also a time to take stock of what this ministry that we have shared for seven years. In writing this report, I went back to the documents from the 2017 search that brought me and Stacie to Lincoln. Right under the mission and vision, this is what you wrote about yourselves:

Our church has a reputation in Lincoln for hosting progressive events and for speaking out against injustice...but only among those people who are paying attention. The general population probably assumes we are just like every other church in town. Therefore, we are determined to become more of a presence in our community. We want to be the church that truly lives its mission and shows up when there is hard work to be done in the name of Unitarian Universalist values. We are, of course, currently involved in outreach activities, but want to enhance and expand those offerings and our members' participation in them.

At the end of any ministry, any relationship, there is grief about what is left undone. But reading these hopes that became our collective marching orders, I am proud of what we did together. The Unitarian Church of Lincoln in 2024 is not the best kept secret in Lancaster County. We are known as a presence at events, a church that lives into its mission and shows up. Attached to the end of this report is my usual timeline of the last year, but also a timeline of major projects of seven years, laying out the arc of this ministry. We have done a lot together to be proud of.

## Thanks

For the last several years, it has been my practice to end my annual report by thanking our outgoing Board members. **Meg Mering** and **JoEllen Polzien** have served this congregation well and faithfully over the last three years. **Elle Straatmann**, who agreed to serve an additional year after the end of her term is cycling off the board after five years: first as a board member, then president, then immediate past president, then board member again. This is a vaguely Ripken-like run, and she has been a wise and compassionate voice throughout. **Kim Ziemann** finishes her year as congregational president this month. I am sorry for the number of headaches I have brought to her attention this year, and hope that this congregation has some understanding of the grace she has brought to an exceptionally challenging board year.

During my time in Lincoln, I finished my Doctorate of Ministry. Lovett Weems, a church leadership professor (and a former seminary president) often says that the most important thing you can say in this job is "I am so proud to serve a church that/where \_\_\_\_\_." He told us to look in a mirror and practice that phrase, even when we were 'hopping mad.' Members of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln: I have never, once, struggled to find things to be proud of this congregation for. It has been an honor to serve here, and I am grateful for all of you.

## 2023-24 Timeline of Major Projects

June

- General Assembly, Pittsburgh, PA

July-August

- Outdoor worship service at Antelope Park
- Board of Trustees Summer Retreat

September

- Congregational year begins with Ingathering
- Stewardship Campaign Launches

October

- Justice in Action Community Problems Assembly, Oscar elected co-president
- Worship workshop

November

- Budget process continues

December

- Winter Congregational Meeting, UCL passes revised bylaws, 2024 budget

January

- Continued aftermath of winter congregational meeting, staff cuts

February

- Board of Trustees Winter Retreat
- Owing Your Religious Past Adult Education Workshop

March

- Rev. Sinclair's Departure Announced

April

- Furloughed

May

- Justice in Action Nehemiah Assembly
- Transitions process continues

June

- General Assembly (online)
- Oscar's departure

## 2017-2024 Major Projects

### 2017-18

- UUA Start Up Workshop
- Bylaws Revision
- Began using Soul Matters worship and small group ministry themes
- Departure of Julie Cross, hiring of Dr. Bob Fuson as Interim Music Director
- Launch of congregational database, Realm
- Oscar on parental leave for 6 weeks following birth of Ailish Margaret
- Joint service of Installation and Ordination, Rev. Natalie Fenimore preaches

### 2018-19

- Rev. Kimberley Debus leads visioning workshop for music program in September
- Launched Third Thursday worship, Bob Fuson becomes permanent Music Director
- Task Force begins considering adding a second Sunday morning worship service
- Ongoing MFC professional complaint regarding Rev. Justin Osterman
- Religious Growth and Learning Director Chelsea Krafka on sabbatical in spring 2019

### 2019-20

- UCL expands limited health insurance benefit to part time employees, including increased giving during pledge drive
- Began offering childcare for committee meetings and programs on Wednesday and Thursday nights
- Second Sunday morning service begins in January, including a 30% increase in average attendance over first three months
- Train and launch lay pastoral care program in February 2020
- COVID closes the church building, effective March 15, 2020. In response, the congregation launches many new projects, including:
  - YouTube based Sunday morning worship
  - Weekly Thursday night vespers on Zoom
  - Zoom Coffee Hour and Open Office Hours
  - Daily eBlasts and videos from Rev. Sinclair
  - Text-based giving
  - Music recording
  - UU Connect, weekly small group gatherings led by worship associates
  - First round Payroll Protection Plan funding
- Rev. Sinclair serves as Faith Coalition of Lancaster County president from 2020-22.

#### 2020-21

- From August 2020-May 2021, worship was fully prerecorded, premiering on YouTube each Sunday morning
- Many projects from March and April 2020 are refined, become part of the fabric of the congregation
- 50 UCL members participate in the “Beloved Conversations” program of Meadville-Lombard Theological Seminary
- May 9, 2021 is first service in person at UCL since March 2020
- Second round Payroll Protection Plan funding

#### 2021-22

- Major project of the year is re-entering, exiting, and re-entering UCL’s building in response to COVID trends and public health advice
- At December Congregational Meeting, UCL votes to change Rev. Sinclair’s title to Senior Minister
- Deepened focus on social justice results in partnerships with OutNebraska, Niskithe Prayer Camp, and early meetings for what will become Justice in Action
- Administrative Director Jean Helms on sabbatical in spring 2022
- Lay led “Summer Indigenous Programming” involving worship, volunteer, and educational opportunities

#### 2022-23

- Justice in Action formally launches in October
- Oral History project gathers stories of the pandemic from over 90 members, interviews are archived in print and audio
- Rev. Sinclair on sabbatical in spring 2023, completes Doctor of Ministry degree.

#### 2023-24

- Major bylaws revision
- Stewardship “reset” results in cuts to staff hours
- Increased attention to adult religious education
- Rev. Sinclair serves as Justice in Action Co-President
- Interim Minister search after Rev. Sinclair announces departure



## **Board President's Report 2024 Spring Congregational Meeting**

The cycles of the seasons show us that change is part of life. Our church community has experienced so many changes in the past few years, and the 2023-24 church year brought more transformation as we had to pivot our thinking and adapt to many challenges and changes.

Our church bylaws state that the purpose of the board of trustees is to provide governance as representatives of the congregation. Boards are responsible for considering the big picture of organizations: policies and long-range planning, bylaws and budget, vision and mission.

As a board, we are committed to love, community, and growth. We love and support our church community through the challenging financial decisions we make, the thoughtful policy work we do, and guiding the church throughout the changes that life brings.

Here are a few highlights of the seasons of our church year:

### **Summer**

- We elected new board of trustees officers for the 2023-2024 congregational year. We started the church year with the following board members: Kim Ziemann, President; Melody Vaccaro, Vice-President; Judy Hart, Immediate Past President; Peg Pelter, Allison Hope Starr, JoEllen Polzien, Allison Hope Starr, Floyd Wickenkamp, Mary K Stillwell, Elle Straatmann (fulfilling Dorothy Ramsey's term).
- We welcomed Marcia Cederdahl as the new chair of the Program Council
- Jason Slaughter began his term as Treasurer, and Karen Heafer was elected as Vice-Treasurer
- The board approved updates to the Finance Handbook and Personnel Handbook
- Our church sent delegates to the UUA General Assembly both in person in Pittsburg and virtually.
- We celebrated the return of our Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair and his family and celebrated our congregation with a picnic potluck in July at Antelope Park
- The amazing volunteers on the Bylaws Taskforce started meeting twice a month with a goal of completing the draft of the bylaws before Thanksgiving and having them approved at the winter congregational meeting.
- A team was established to explore revisions to our Vision and Mission
- The board voted to approve a much overdue Financial Review
- The Stewardship Ministry Team started meeting to plan for the annual giving campaign and also to research other year-round stewardship opportunities
- The board began budget discussions while the Program Council and committees began work on budget requests.

- At the Summer Retreat, leaders developed four priorities for the church year:
  - aligning staff and ministerial salaries with the UUA-suggested midpoint guidelines.
  - implementing a funding plan for building and grounds sustainability.
  - increasing involvement and engagement across all parts of the congregation and strengthening volunteer leadership.
  - And expanding collaborative efforts on human rights advocacy including but not limited to Justice in Action, legislative advocacy, and social movements that align with our denominational values.
    - Many of our church members are involved in Justice in Action, and Oscar was recently elected to be co-president.

**Fall:**

- The Annual Giving Campaign had its Kickoff with a Potluck on September 10
- Board members encouraged congregant conversations about special memories at church and why our church is important
- Our church hosted the Otoe Missouriia Brunch on September 22
- The Bylaws Review task force continued to meet and do revision work, as well as planning for presenting the revised Bylaws to the congregation
- A confidentiality statement was drafted.
- The new heat pump was installed
- The Stewardship Ministry began meeting
- The Mission and Vision team continued to plan and discuss
- Our 501c3 status went into effect.
- We met with church leaders of the Omaha UU churches and hope to continue that partnership
- The Executive committee, comprised of the board president, vice-president, treasurer, vice treasurer, Program Council Chair, and Minister, met multiple times to work on the budget.
- The second chance Auction was a huge success
- Then the Board planned and held two town hall meetings and the Winter Congregational Meeting
- The 2024 budget was approved. While pledging amounts were high, expenses were higher and income was down in other areas. Difficult decisions were made to cut funding for programming, reduce staff hours, and furlour our minister for three months in 2024. Salaries were raised to the UUA-suggested midpoint, but were budgeted at the changed work hours.
- The revised Bylaws were approved.

## **Winter**

- Board members and the LUF committee (now known as the Capital Investment Committee) held meetings to collaborate about LUF and Board relations and the LUF Board agreement
- The Stewardship Ministry continued meeting to develop ideas for creating a broader income base.
- A winter board retreat was held where we deepened connections as church leaders, examined changes in church demographics, and discussed our priorities for the remainder of the church year.
- A review of the 2023 finances showed that we ended the 2023 church year with a deficit (this had no connection to the budget passed in December for the 2024 year). For our 2023 budget year, our expenses were right on target for what we budgeted, but our income was considerably lower than expected. Our rental income and money from fundraisers exceeded expectations, but our pledge repayment was only 85%.

## **Spring**

- Church leaders and long-term repair and replace stakeholders met to develop a plan for Building and Grounds Sustainability.
- Board members and the LUF committee (now known as the Capital Investment Committee) continued to collaborate
- Our minister, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, announced that he had accepted an offer to candidate at Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota, and was selected to be their next settled minister.
- Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair was gone during the month of April because of being furloughed.
- An interim minister search team was approved by the board, and they began the work of developing our church's profile on the Minister Search System
- Listening sessions were held to answer questions and listen to concerns as we proceeded with the Interim Minister search process.
- The Board of Trustees and Program Council held a forum to discuss what works well with our current governance model and how we can make it even better.
- The Auction was a success, thanks to Karen Heafer and Barbara Pearson, and all the amazing people who donated and bid on items.
- The financial review was scheduled for June.
- The interim minister search team checked references for and interviewed the four highly qualified candidates who applied for the position.
- Bluestem Montessori will be leaving UCL in June, but we have signed a contract for a preschool/daycare to rent our building.
- Rev. A.J. Galazen accepted our offer to be the next interim minister at UCL starting on August 1st.

Our Church remains an incredibly vital place. Look at what we have accomplished this year. Look at the calendar, the work of the committees, the joy of children and youth in RGL, the wonderful music in our services, and our partnerships in the community.

We are here because we care about our church. I'm so grateful for your commitment to show up. I send a thank you to everyone who participated in the Town Halls and Congregational Meeting, and all who will be voting. Being part of this democratic process is one of the many ways our members show up to support and care for our church community.

I want to say thank you to our minister, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, for all you have done with us in the past seven years. You will be missed and we wish you well in the next seasons of your life.

I also send my thanks of our amazing staff: our administrative director Jean Helms, our religious growth and learning director Chelsea Krafka, our music director Bob Fuson, our administrative associate Wendy Hestermann, and our choir director Julie Enerson. We value the work you do for our church.

I am so grateful to all of the leaders of UCL. Much time, energy, and dedication goes into volunteering for leadership positions. Thank you to the committee members and chairs, program council liaisons, and our program council chair Marcia Cederdahl. Your work is crucial.

While I may be the voice of the board, the governance work is done by all of the members of the board. Thank you all.

A special thanks goes to those members whose board terms are ending: JoEllen Polzien, Meg Mering, and Elle Straatmann,

In June we start a new season. We welcome new members to the Board of Trustees and will be electing new officers. We will be saying goodbye to Oscar and welcoming a new interim minister. The seasons to come will surely bring even more change. But we are about the work of transforming ourselves and the world, together, through love.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your board of trustees president.

Kim Ziemann (she/her)  
President of the Board of Trustees  
Unitarian Church of Lincoln

## 2024 Spring Treasurer report

I have now been in this position for now a full year. To say this has been a learning experience is something of an understatement. I appreciate the support and the guidance from a lot of members of this church.

This past 12 months we have some challenges and some successes. Let me walk you through this year of finances. Let us start with the budget process for 2024. We had an amazing Annual Giving Campaign. As we reported in the Fall we had one of our largest pledging engagements than we have had in many years. This was an amazing accomplishment we did and we have to celebrate that.

The challenge that we face in the budget is the increase of expenses. This is something that is a bit beyond our control in some of the areas. This has affected how we pay our staff and cuts in different areas of ministry in their budget lines. I know this has been a very tough pill to swallow, but it is something that we have been able to adapt to. All in all we have a budget that we can feel proud of and it shows that we are fiscally responsible and working at becoming a more sustainable financially.

Here in the next month we will have our external Financial review. We expect this to go well and hopefully some helpful insights to make sure we continue to be as financial stable as we have in the past years.

Throughout the year we have had some good changes in the financial team. First we have created a new Stewardship committee that is designed to help create and sustain new ways for us to generate income and also help people find a way to use their time and talents. Judy Kelly has been leading this group and she has done a great job with this new venture. Next we have seen a change in LUF, they have agreed to change their name to "Capital Investment Committee". While this may seem trivial this is actually a big step for this committee and I also see some great things coming from this group in the next year.

With the recent hiring of the Interim minister for our church, the Board made the decision to pay the new minister at full salary. With the decision on the budget to furlough the Senior minister for 3 months this year. This did change the compensation line for the minister salary. Since it was an unexpected expense we are going to pull from reserves to make up that difference. How much we pull from reserve is not yet final due to some cost have not been fully realized yet. We will have more on this during our Fall Meeting.

Where are we financially as a church, with all of these changes? We are still stable but we will have critical decisions to make over the next 12 months. As we look forward to the next year we will be look at how we can have sustainable income streams that we hope to help develop more additional sources of revenue. I know as a community we want to return our staff to full-time statuses. We have to realize that this is going to take time. This next budget cycle will give us an idea if we are heading in the right direction.

As your treasurer it is my job to help make us keep moving forward and help support the teams that make this church go. I encourage you all if you have a question or a concern that you come to me so I can help get you the answer and also listen to any idea you may have.

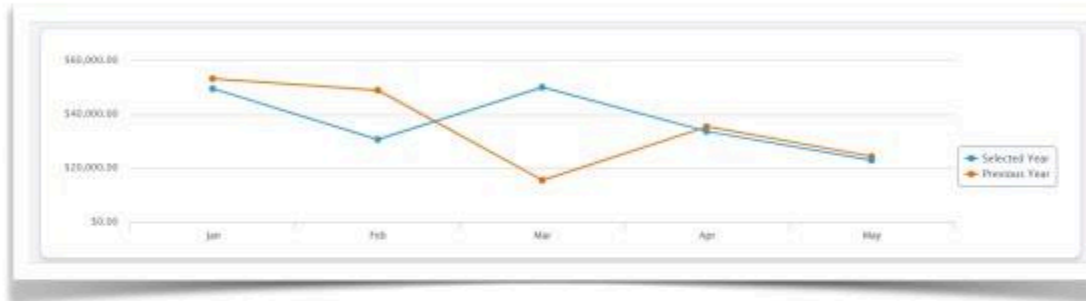
I have a great team that works with me. I would like to recognize Karen Heafer the Vice-Treasurer. Our amazing Staff of Jean and Wendy who make sure our books are put together correctly. I also want to thank Oscar with his passion for math and making sure we are on the right path financially, we will miss your talents.

Thank you, Jason Slaughter

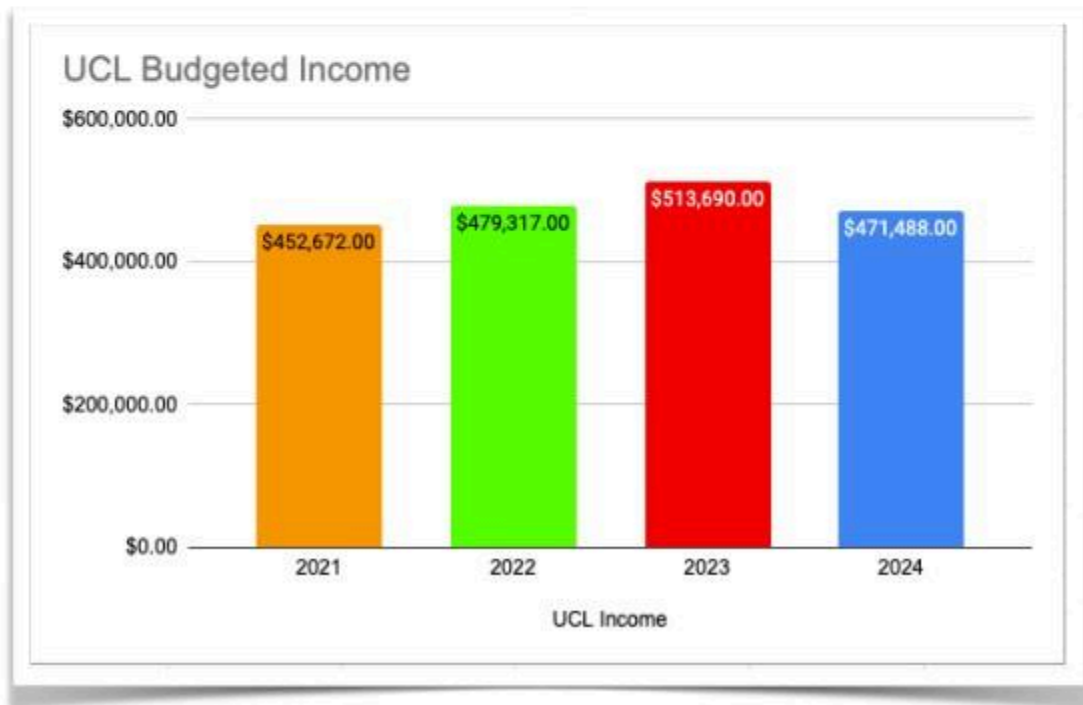
# 2024 UCL Treasurer Addendum

## Income:

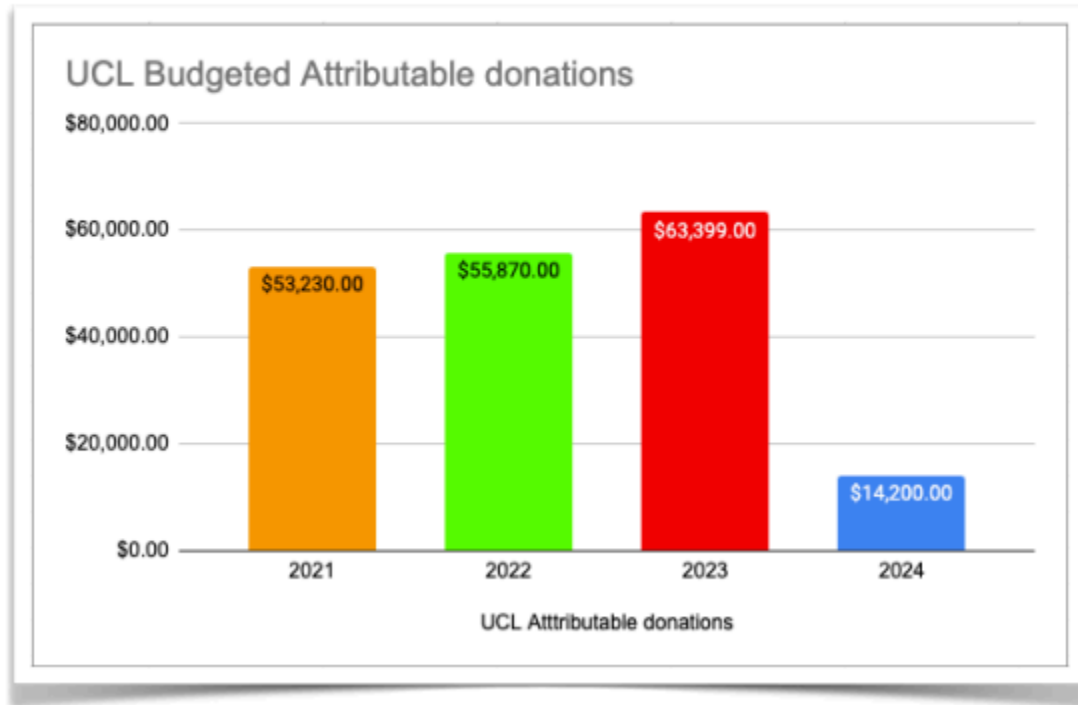
Pledging for 2023 vs 2024: 2023 is orange 2024 is Blue.



History of Budgeted Income:



History of Budgeted Attributable Donations



## PROGRAM COUNCIL REPORT

Good morning,

This is my first report as Program Council chair so I decided to begin my time by sharing this quote: “.it starts when you say **We** and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more.” --Marge Piercy, from *The Low Road*, *Beloved Conversations*, April 2023.

I thought how do I start this report? After much deliberation, I decided to look to our governance documents to help me explain what the program council does and what we have accomplished this year. (Sometimes that organization chart is pretty confusing!) This is what I have the privilege of sharing with you today.

The revised Program Council policy states:

*PURPOSE AND FORMATION: The Program Council is to address operational issues of the church. The Program Council shall be comprised of 6 liaisons to clusters of committees, activity groups, and task organizers with similar functions. The Program Council shall be led by the Program Council Chair whose selection is set forth in the Church Bylaws.*



Under stewardship, the policy also states: “Whether through time, talent, or treasure (or more than one of these), each of us contributes to the common good as our personal circumstances allow. The Program Council remains committed to the church community as fully as possible even in times of difficulty, acknowledging that together we are stronger and heal more fully.” This last sentence is even more meaningful to me as you all have supported me and helped me in my healing since my beloved Ray died in January of this year.

The program council’s the work is done by the 6 Clusters each led by a great Cluster Liaison.

This year I had the pleasure of working with the following leaders:

- Abby Lemburg McDowell, Youth in Action cluster
- Barbara Pearson - Facilities Cluster
- Patti Cuevas - Outreach Cluster
- Judy Kelly- Adult Programs Cluster
- Kathy Disney - Congregation Cluster
- Bob Haack, - Sunday Services Cluster, replacing Jamie Radcliffe – thank you so very much Jamie for your service!

Today I am representing these 6 Cluster Leaders, and the members and leaders of the committees and Task Force groups of each Cluster reporting the accomplishments of this past church year.

I am so very proud of these accomplishments of the 2023-2024 Program Council including:

- Staff were invited to attend & participate in the monthly program council meetings.
- The bylaws were changed after discussion (and participation with the bylaws task force) to reflect that much of the program council activity has been moved to the revised policy for the program council.
- The Otoe-Missouria representatives returned to Lincoln in September, and the program Council assisted with hosting and providing a meal for them.
- Discussion on the Board of Trustees priority for 23-24; the program council continued to add the priorities to our monthly agenda, with emphasis on the third priority: “We commit to increasing involvement and engagement across all parts of the congregation and strengthening volunteer leadership.”
- The annual giving campaign began in early fall and was changed to reflect stewardship. *Stewardship is the value that embodies our responsibility to care for the Unitarian Church of Lincoln (UCL). Stewardship is not just about financial support, but also includes how we invest our time and talent in strengthening our church.*
- A zoom meeting was held with First UU in Omaha on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>, they shared information on how they changed from a program council to a ministry team council governance.
- The Second chance auction in November was a huge success and raised well beyond the initial \$3,000 that was hoped to happen. Many many thanks to Karen Heafer and Barbara Pearson who co-chaired this delightful event, as well as all those who contributed.

- The program council decided that each cluster would “adopt a month” where they would do various activities throughout that month, such as host coffee, have a table after church, hold an activity to increase involvement and understanding of the program council.
- The outreach committee held the Winter Lecture Series via zoom: The 2024 lecture series was on global democracy and the evident rise of various strongmen. The topic was “Can Democracy Be Saved? The Global Trend Toward Strongman Rule.”
- The online auction held this Spring was a great success! Again, many thanks to the wonderful co-chairs, Karen Heafer and Barbara Pearson.
- The program council decided that each cluster would “adopt a month” where they would do various activities throughout that month, such as host coffee, have a table after church, hold an activity to increase involvement and understanding of the program council.
- The Program Council and the Board of Trustees held a joint meeting in April, to clarify how the PC and BOT work together to increase congregational knowledge. Feedback was positive, with encouragement given to all the program council clusters and their members to attend the board retreat. Developing relationships is an important piece of this process!
- The Program Council was asked to take the lead on the opening of the time capsule that was placed 25 years ago. This is scheduled to happen May 26<sup>th</sup>, after the service. Articles from the time capsule will be on display at church for the next month.
- There are so many more accomplishments I could mention! Let me finish by saying how proud I am to represent this talented group, and to be a part of this congregation. I would like to close with this quote from the current Soul Matters “Why be a star when you can be a constellation”  
~ Miriam Kaba

## **2023-2024 Religious Growth and Learning Annual Report Submitted by: Chelsea Krafka – Director of Religious Growth and Learning**

We have had a beautiful year focused on relationships and connection. This year our classes were yet again adapted to different needs. We combined K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade, and our 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade groups. Our amazing volunteers used the Soul Matters Curriculum which correlated with Worship themes to guide our program. Abby Lemburg McDowell continues to lead our Youth In Action program for 6-12<sup>th</sup> graders. We had Shelly Fowler and Judy Hart join the RGL Committee.

We began the year with another backpack blessing for children who were headed off to school which emphasized carrying UU values with them wherever they go. After offering an 'OWL Interest form' we learned that we did not have enough people express interest in OWL for winter, so we will hold off and re-assess in fall of 2024 once children move up a grade. (OWL stands for: Our Whole Lives – Sexuality Education Class). We had a successful UU Pen Pal program, Soup Supper, Tile Painting for a future mosaic, as well as our Easter Egg Hunt which raised money for three local nonprofits. We also introduced JETPIG which is a stuffed pig who tags along for activities which embody the words from the proposed Article II language.

Professionally, I was accepted into the Religious Education Credentialing Program and look forward to deepening my understanding of Unitarian Universalism through the lens of Religious Education. I have continued work with the Lifespan Faith Engagement office on their new anti-racist anti-oppression curriculum called 'Mosaic'. I have also continued work making suggestions and reviewing for the Tapestry of Faith relaunch and renewal. I am excited to announce that I have accepted a position as the MidAmerica Regional Administrator which I will be doing alongside my work as Director of Education at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. I have also attended a variety of workshops such as the Deeper Joy collaboration from the Lifespan Faith Engagement Office, and attended a regional UU Conference in Denver, General Assembly, and the conference for Liberal Religious Educators (LREDA).

We are looking forward to the 1999 Time Capsule opening on Memorial Day weekend. This summer we are adapting programming due to budget cuts. The RGL Committee is taking on either teaching or recruiting a leader for one Sunday in summer as well as creating a 'Sunday School in a Bag' activity for our paid childcare providers who typically just work in our preschool room. I am excited to continue our brainstorming for plans in the fall with hopes for another shift in programming with new excitement and creativity.

# **Board Report - Music**

## **2023-2024**

In many ways this is a difficult report to write. The focus of my job, music ministry, is mostly unaffected by recent changes. In fact music ministry at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln has continued to thrive. The administration and logistical aspects of it have deteriorated tremendously.

Music continues to be a cornerstone of worship at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. Throughout much of the year our programs have fulfilled their mission as representatives of the UCL Community.

### **UCL Choir**

The choir has continued to excel under the direction of Julie Enersen, centering the work of composers of many identities. Though the membership/numbers fluctuate from service to service, the quality of performance continues to be high. I would also like to highlight the fine work of our collaborative pianist Bill Carpenter. We are blessed to have them on staff. The volunteers have stepped up and provided a fantastic service to the congregation. The choir performs every month during the church year and involves anywhere from ten to forty volunteers.

### **The A Street Band**

The band has become a vital component of UCL music. From early in 2023 to the recently completed tent revival, they have been on an absolute tear. The band performs at an extremely high level, and their creativity has become unbound. I would point to the band as a stellar example of music ministry, where volunteers have grown and pushed their own boundaries to create something truly incredible. The band is also a fine example of intergenerational worship, as the group is comprised of members from their teens into their seventies. If you are not attending these services you're missing out, plain and simple. The band performs every other month at the Third Thursday vespers service, including opening the year at Antelope Park and ending the year with the Tent Revival.

### **Guest Musicians**

Guest music remains a capstone of the music area. From our music staff to congregants to special guests to recorded music across the UUA, the music presented during Sunday services fulfills our quest to be a supporter of the arts. I

am particularly proud of the variety of musics presented. I am grateful that the guest music budget was restored fully - reductions would be detrimental to the health of the area and to the vibrancy of Sunday services.

## **Community Partnerships**

UCL currently has partnerships of various degrees of involvement with several local organisations.

- Lincoln Music Teacher's Association - the church is a regular space for hosting LMTA events; the Music Director is a member and chairs the Sheet Music Committee; the church provides space for donated music and other items down in the music area across from the Music Director's office
- Lincoln Association for the Traditional Arts - the Music Director has previously served on the board, but has done so in a limited capacity due to time constraints and staff cuts; the church remains a viable host for LAFTA events
- The Nebraska Chamber Players - the chamber players perform all of their ticketed events at the church; they pay for the piano to be tuned several times a year; the Music Director provides A/V support for all events

Note - these partnerships were formed before staff cuts, and the Music Director's participation has been severely curtailed in 2024 as a result.

## **Waystation Concerts**

Due to staff cuts Waystation Concerts no longer have the support of the music area or the involvement of the Music Director. They will continue to be run by volunteers with staff involvement limited to calendar approval.

## **A Center of Culture**

Due to staff cuts all work toward making UCL a center of culture and supporter of the arts in Lincoln has ceased. Anything happening now is volunteer led and does not have the support, approval, or involvement of the Music Director.

## **Audio/Visual Support**

In the early part of the church year the Music Director oversaw the completion of a project in which an area/room microphone was installed. This was at the behest of the congregation, who wished to hear more of the service participants when singing hymns.



As of January 1st, 2024, the Music Director is no longer overseeing nor is he available for A/V support unless hired as a consultant at an hourly rate.

## **Summation**

The music area as a whole has continued to be a jewel in the church's crown, one that reaches people across spectrums and supports the original charge given to us. Our mission and goals in music has not changed, and we continue to work hard and achieve results.

Cuts to the budget and staff salaries, among other things, have made all but the barest functions of the area possible, and volunteers have expressed concerns about what that means for the future. For myself it amounts to the feeling of being punished despite the good work that has been done. I feel like more is being asked of me and my area while support both administratively and financially has dwindled.

I will ensure that music is always relevant to our values and of the highest quality no matter what happens. I would be happy to discuss it further, and I hope for better communication in the future.

Please let me know if there are any further questions.

Sincerely,

Bob Fuson, DMA  
Music Director

## **ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

**Prepared by Jean Helms  
Church Year 2023-2024**

Many of you only see me on Sundays or at the occasional potluck, so you may not know that my official job description encompasses all of these things:

- Facility Management
- Rental Oversight
- Financial Management
- Professional Support
- Office Management and Supervision
- Communication

In my Administrative Director role I now work 30 hours per week and each week is different! I really like my job because I get to do a lot of different things. I love numbers, so I enjoy the financial and bookkeeping parts. I love people, so I enjoy interacting with members and friends. I love a challenge, so this job has stretched me and it keeps things interesting!

More than anything I love working with a group of people who continually inspire each other. I am amazed by the vast number of events in which our members and friends participate onsite and out in the community. Recently I was inspired by the fact that, for the second year in a row, we made up more than 10% of the audience at the second annual Justice in Action Nehemiah event on Thursday, May 2.

I mentioned that “each week is different” for a reason. I want to help everyone understand why we ask for two-weeks notice on large mailings and have deadlines for communications pieces. There are events that occur annually for which the office is able to plan ahead. There are other times when there is an unplanned event that takes us away from our usual duties and cause delays.

One thing that is less visible, that unfortunately happens a few times a year, is when one of our beloved members dies. The logistics of a Celebration of Life or Memorial Service (beyond the selection of a date and time) are nuanced, specific and require a special presence when asking a grieving family member to make decisions. These are the times when I often have to ask other members and friends for grace with deadlines and expectations. I have become better at setting boundaries, saying “No” when needed and asking for grace in these circumstances.

This year is bringing new challenges. We are losing our beloved minister of seven years and welcoming Rev. Galazen as our interim for the next two years. There are many things that I am looking forward to, after we get over the hurdle of onboarding a new minister, including the congregational discernment of our mission and vision. Each week, and each year, is a little different. In the office we are continually making improvements, tweaking things to serve the good of the whole, and trying new things. I have worked in this position for almost sixteen years, and I hope to continue working here until I retire. A special thanks to all of the Dazzlers (office volunteers), and those who are serving on the Visibility Team, without whom we would never be able to move as quickly and accomplish so much.

## **Administrative Associate Report**

**Prepared by Wendy Hestermann**

**Spring Congregational Meeting**

**June 2, 2024**

The primary daily functions of this position are routine in nature—sorting mail, preparing deposits, updating databases, taking phone calls, email correspondence, keeping the calendar current, face-to-face interactions with congregants, service people, walk-ins and renters, sending out the weekly e-blasts and proofreading newsletters and reports. This position also supports other staff members as needed. Additional resources and time are required to prepare for ceremonies, meetings, budgets, auctions and other projects identified by the Administrative Director.

Additionally, there are extensive ongoing projects that periodically require extra attention, the largest of these being the tracking and updating of pledge information as it comes in. Other periodic projects include setting up YouTube links and maintaining the signup sheets for coffee makers/greeters/ushers, supplying sorted credit card data for inclusion in the monthly financial reports, and providing bank statements as needed.

This position is part-time at 15 hours per week, so I am only in the office on certain days. There is flexibility if I need to be gone during my regular hours as things can be done at other times. Between the Admin Director, myself and the Dazzlers, we make sure there is someone here for all open office hours.

After nearly two years of working in this position, I can truly say I am blessed to have a place, both in this church and here in the office. I enjoy my days here, where quirks are appreciated and opportunities to help others abound. This is a supportive, challenging and enjoyable environment.