

Rev. AJ and the board recently received a letter pointing out that Sunday services focus heavily on governance rather than spirituality. We appreciate this feedback.

Our church is in an interim phase. Last year, we said goodbye to Rev. Oscar Sinclair and searched for an interim minister. Rev. AJ Galazan arrived in August, and everyone, including the congregation, committees, staff, and board members, began working on the transition, acutely aware of its liminal nature.

During a recent correspondence with Rev. AJ, a phrase he used resonated with me. I quote, “Voluntary leadership in a voluntary organization is a shared and cooperative enterprise, not a personal exercise in religious ambition.”

A Unitarian Church is a “voluntary organization.” The Unitarian Church of Lincoln exists because we, everyone in this room and everyone attending this meeting virtually, want and need this liberal faith community. We build, nurture, and sustain this church together. We cannot imagine Lincoln without it.

I deeply appreciate our members and their volunteer leadership. Members have signed the book and promised with their signature to honor our covenant of right relations and to share their time, talent, and treasure.

They are the individuals who say “yes” when asked. They are the people who see a need or a possibility and bring it to life.

Our membership holds two crucial church meetings each year. The December meeting marks the end of our fiscal year, and the spring meeting marks the end of our church year.

Since the end of the pandemic, our church has offered town halls before each congregational meeting to allow the members to ask questions or raise concerns about decisions being voted on at the congregational meetings.

My president's report reflects on communication, education, transitions, restructuring, culture shifts, and emotional highs and lows of the last church year.

I will start with gratitude for our current board of trustees, the program council leadership, and our staff: Allison Starr, Peg Pelter, Melody Vaccaro, Floyd Wickenkamp, Mary K Stillwell, Sue Goebel, Leslie Ryan, and Michael Straatmann. Marcia Cederdahl, Bob Haack, Kathy Disney, Barbara Pearson, and Angie Faas. Jean Helms, Stephanie Herrick, Abby Lemburg McDowell, and Julie Enersen. Kindly rise for acknowledgment. (applause) Thank you.

I shared highlights of major church activities from June to December at the winter congregational meeting. Those highlights are notes in the minutes we are voting to approve.

There might be some overlap with my previous report, so please bear with me. This is a lengthy list, so save your applause until the end.

- We welcomed Interim Minister Rev. AJ Galazan.
- We had a successful annual giving campaign followed by budget reality.
- We agonized over justifying our priorities with our staffing.
- We evaluated and reimaged our current program areas.
- We complied with the IRS Fair Labor Standards Act.
- We received financial gifts from the Maxcy, Speidel, Singaas, Furgason, Weymouth, and Braziel families.
- We embraced the Soul Matters monthly themes.
- We received the Five Practices of Welcome Renewal Congregation for 2024, and congratulations from the UUA on our ongoing commitment to LGBTQ+ welcome and inclusion in and beyond Lincoln, NE. All, thanks to our diligent church members. Note: The UCL LGBTQ+ welcoming committee has returned thanks to more volunteer leaders at our church.

- A Stalwart team of four church members became the Transition Team and held four Transition Town Halls to listen and collect information.
- We had another successful church auction because of an excellent team of volunteers.
- Note: Our generous UCL bakers created many tasty treats.
- An inventory of UCL's technical resources is being created.
- The Visibility Team got stronger and is more visible.
- The Gift Acceptance and Personnel Policies were updated, along with the Personnel Handbook.
- The Capital Investment Committee continued to manage our investments on behalf of the whole congregation.
- A newly installed office phone system triggered alarms and disabled the front door entry code system. The issue was resolved with the assistance of church members.
- The carpeting in the entire church building was thoroughly cleaned.
- Sunday coffee service resumed, with special thanks to more church members.
- Board members from Omaha Second Unitarian Church attended the winter board retreat via Zoom to help us understand the process they recently completed to call their minister.
- Both UCL board retreats were open to all interested church members, with special invitations to the program council.
- The Green Sanctuary Committee continues to lead the fight for climate justice in our city and state.
- Our website is getting better every day, thanks to the focus of our Admin. Director. Note: Our next minister will look at our website to learn who we are and how we prioritize our message to the public.
- We continue to have beautiful newsletters in print and online, thanks to resolute and creative volunteers.
- A hearing loop system is being installed thanks to the persistence of another church member who saw it through from request to installation.

- The west-facing playground was resurfaced, and a shade structure was created. No one did that alone.
- Our pulpit is decorated with flowers every week thanks to another group of church members.
- We are greeted every Sunday by more volunteers, and we get to enjoy beautiful artwork in the gallery thanks to another team of volunteers.
- We live our mission and vision publicly with our Share the Plate Community partnerships.
- Our relationship with Justice and Action and with our Indigenous relatives continues to grow. Note: UCL organized 165 people to show up at the May 1 Justice in Action Nehemiah Assembly.
- Another note: In July, our Sunday services will again focus on our Indigenous relatives and learning opportunities in our region.
- We have fully staffed program areas with remarkable individuals who are collaborating with our volunteer committees to make UCL the place we want it to be. Note: The personnel committee helped with the hiring process, from checking references to attending interviews.
- The program council committees, choir, and small group ministries offer church members and friends. numerous opportunities for engagement and participation.
- The Office Dazzlers continue to dazzle as they complete the mighty list of tasks they accomplish each day.
- A team of board and nominations committee members canvassed our church members to see who they would like to nominate to serve on the Ministerial Search team.
- And we ponder the question, “What is the right size of our church?”

It has been quite a year, and it is time for applause.

I will end with a couple of quotes:

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” – Mahatma Gandhi

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead