

Unitarian Church of Lincoln

Settled Minister

Lincoln, Nebraska | MidAmerica Region

Regional Contact: Rev. Sharon Dittmar | sdittmar@uua.org

About Unitarian Church of Lincoln

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.unitarianlincoln.org>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

6300 A St
Lincoln, NE 68510-5009

This Congregation **has** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

Our intergenerational congregation has a wide range of diversity in age, socioeconomic levels, experience, involvement, and beliefs. We have a culture of care for each other, our community, and our world. We have a long tradition of being a place of welcome and sanctuary for the LGBTQIA+ community in Lincoln. Many of our members are passionate about specific ideas, especially social justice. Though we have historically encouraged new members to fit into old ways, we are pivoting toward new ways of being in community. We are people willing to embrace change.

On our best days, we are at the forefront of community action such as Justice in Action and working with our indigenous neighbors. We acknowledge that we are not as far along in our anti-oppression journey as we'd like to be and we recommit to that work. Our worship is vibrant, the sermon is thought-provoking and our choir inspires us through music. A potluck follows. Our children are active and happy in our building and playground and everyone shows up for the fall grounds clean-up and brings their own rake!

On our average days, we show up. We are present and do what needs to be done. We honor commitments and move the work of the church forward. There is plenty of coffee after church. Several of us greet a transgender woman who is visiting for the first time to help her feel safe and welcome.

On our worst days, we are probably in a town hall meeting. We struggle to recognize everyone's inherent worth and dignity. We may huddle to gossip and are cynical; we feel superior. We fail to speak up when we notice microaggressions among the congregation. One or more of us stands to speak for all of us as if their lived experience is universal. We need a chalice in the kitchen where we often fail to extend grace to one another. Even so, a greeter meets you at the front door. There is coffee.

Your Congregation's mission:

MISSION:

We are people of open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands, who show up.

VISION:

We aspire to be a loving community uniting reason with spiritual exploration to transform ourselves and our world.

COVENANT:

Our covenant, as a welcoming congregation, is to inspire a sense of awe, joy and reverence in people of all ages. We celebrate through words, music and the arts. We actively model an inclusive, diverse, and sustainable community. We each contribute to the work of the church. We provide a safe and nurturing haven for free thought. We treat each other with loving kindness. We cultivate growth and celebrate the changes growth brings.

At our Winter 2023 Congregational meeting, we voted to approve our newly revised Bylaws which remove our Mission, Vision, and Covenant from the Bylaws. The goal of doing so was to make these statements a living part of our church and more easily revised as we change as a congregation. We have been reexamining who we are and who we want to become for over a year and having many conversations about revising our mission and vision.

Describe and provide examples of how your Congregation lives its values:

Our church mission and vision focus on showing up to transform ourselves and the world. We do that in many ways, including:

- supporting ten local nonprofits through Share the Plate annually
- representation on the Interfaith Housing Coalition
- sharing our building with community groups such as the Nebraska Chamber Players, Teach Peace Preschool & Childcare, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, the Nebraska Music Teachers' Association, Order of the Red Grail, Audubon Society, and more
- revised our bylaws to remove a pledge requirement for membership to be more inclusive
- community care through card senders, Friendly Faces visitations, and comfort shawls
- care for new members with personal contacts and "get acquainted" dinners
- prioritizing the earth by building-wide recycling, geothermal system, solar panels, and a pantry garden
- maintaining a Little Free Pantry on church grounds
- offering robust small group ministries, including Open Circles since 2000 and UU Connects groups since 2020
- supporting many causes including children raising money for UNICEF and Social Justice committee selling Fair Trade items, a holiday service focused on collecting donations for local groups
- promoting ongoing learning through sponsoring the Winter Lecture Series
- civic engagement on social justice issues through letter-writing campaigns to local, state, and national leaders
- participating in local protest marches as well as marches to support marginalized groups with our banner and t-shirts in proud evidence
- one of the founding faith communities of Justice in Action, a DART-based interfaith justice network in Lancaster County, and the newly formed Faith Allyance (LGBTQ support within local churches)
- continued involvement with re-indigenizing southeast Nebraska

What potential applicants should know about the congregation's lay leadership:

Many members have taken on several different leadership positions over the course of their involvement with the church, and often it feels like the same people are serving over and over again. Committee leadership and membership does turn over on a regular (although not mandated) basis with the exception of tasks requiring technical or specialized knowledge (e.g. building and A/V committees).

From the 2025 congregational survey: Nearly 6 in 10 of the respondents (144) had been volunteer leaders in the last year including 17 who had chaired a committee, 63 who had served on one more or committees and a notable 4 who had chaired more than one committee. Other volunteer leadership included serving on the Board of Trustees (15 respondents), Program Council service (7 respondents), and chairing or leading a fund raising activity such as the pledge drive or auction (7 respondents) and Capital Investment Committee service (6 respondents).

Of the current Board of Trustees membership (nine elected, four ex-officio), two people have been members less than five years, 3 people 5 to 10 years, two people 10 to 20 years and 6 have been members over 20 years. We have a history of always having a full board. If someone cannot finish their term, a substitute is usually readily found.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZJ6apE1RE2MdjZIVXs7QPCYfmWxD7WZw/view?usp=sharing>

Worship service schedule:

Sunday services are held in-person and via live stream at 10 a.m. The video from the service is then posted on YouTube for people to view later. Worship associates support the minister in leading Sunday services. On Sundays when the minister is not preaching and for several weeks during the summer, the services are led by the worship associates. All involved in the services have access to a worship grid in Google Drive. Our congregation does use the Soul Matters themes in worship in a broad way, with flexibility for different thematic choices for both the minister and lay worship leaders.

Typical Sunday services start with warm-up community singing, a welcome, chalice lighting, and opening words. We usually have 3 hymns interspersed through the service and music from guest musicians as well as our own members and friends. A “Time for All Ages” story is read for both the young and young at heart. The worship associates often give many of the readings. Our service themes frequently follow Soul Matters.

Summer worship hours do not vary from other times of the year. For the past four years, July has been devoted to Indigenous programming with Sunday services and other presentations/events/movie nights centered around our local indigenous neighbors, particularly the Otoe-Missouria tribe on whose last chosen land the church sits. With their input, we developed a land acknowledgement which is read from the pulpit periodically.

Seating in our sanctuary is flexible. Our church has chairs instead of pews, which can be arranged in various configurations depending on the needs of the service.

Our dress code varies depending on personal preference. Our past experience with ministers’ attire ranges from robe and stole to classic business attire. Our congregants dress casually for the most part.

Childcare is offered during services for infants and children up to 5 years old. Childcare is also offered during some meetings. Generally, children attend the first 15 minutes or so of the service and go to their classes after the “Time for All Ages” story. Within the sanctuary, we have a small table with crafts and activities to engage children (and adults if they choose). We have several intergenerational services when children and youth stay for the entire service.

Personnel

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Allen Galazen	Interim Minister		2024
Jean Helms	Administrative Director	40	2011
Julie Enersen	Music Director/choir director	15	2018

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Abby Lemburg-McDowell	Youth Ministry Coordinator	10	2025
Michael Straatmann	President/Chair		2025
Wendy Hestermann	Administrative Associate	15	2022
Stephanie Herrick	Membership Coordinator	10	2025

Describe the diversity in congregational staffing, now and in the past. Detail how leadership can assure opportunities and on-going support for people with marginalized identities in hiring practices:

From Unitarian Church of Lincoln Personnel Policy: The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, as an employer, believes in treating each employee with dignity and respect, recognizes the individual worth of each employee, and believes in helping employees develop their potential. The Unitarian Church of Lincoln seeks to provide equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. The Unitarian Church of Lincoln fully complies with all applicable Federal, State, and local anti-discrimination laws.

In the past twenty years, our core staff has been predominantly white-identifying with a couple of exceptions. This mirrors the lack of racial diversity in the congregation. Within the last ten years, one person on core staff identified as multi-racial, and five childcare providers during that same time period identified as non-white/multi-racial.

In other aspects, we have had a broad spectrum in terms of gender expression and sexual orientation. We have had exclusively white male ministers with the exception of two interim ministers. We have had a majority of female presenting core staff and childcare providers. Particularly in the last ten years we have had a good mix of age groups represented on staff. We don't have data on individuals on staff who might have disabilities.

In the hiring process, we make sure to share our values and principles frequently and make sure candidates know that we take them seriously, we strive to be welcoming. When we hire we make it clear in the posting/advertising that we do not discriminate based on the personnel policy listed above. We have typically hired through our website and personal networks as well as public job sites.

Additional personnel notes:

We have many volunteers (known collectively as the Dazzlers) who support our office staff every week. Our religious education program also has multiple volunteers who teach, assist, and serve on the Youth Ministry Committee to support our Youth Ministry Coordinator. Our preschool room has a paid preschool lead teacher and paid childcare staff who work 1-4 hours per week. We also have a paid custodian.

The church office has reduced hours during the summer. This last summer the church office was staffed from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

Our church has a long history in Lincoln and a long-time reputation for social justice work in Nebraska.

The First Universalist Society was organized on September 1, 1870, in the home of J.D. and Mary Monell. There were eight charter members. They possessed property on the corner of Twelfth and H streets from a grant they secured from the State legislature. Through persistent fundraising, a small frame chapel was built and dedicated on June 3, 1872.

With financial aid from the denomination, the society called Rev. James Gerton to be its first pastor. He was forced to resign in 1873 due to lack of funds. In 1883 they called Rev. E.H. Chapin and constructed a parsonage. The Unitarians in Lincoln organized and adopted a constitution in 1891 and built their church on 12th and H in 1893. The church reorganized on May 27, 1898, and became All Souls Unitarian Church with ninety-six charter members. The members were Universalists and Unitarians as both groups combined resources to pay off the loan on the church. All Souls Unitarian Church, which existed for over forty years, changed its name to The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska in 1951.

Our first home was a large brick structure at 12th and H streets. In 1960, the congregation built a new church, its current home, at 6300 A Street, and the first service was held in the new building on October 1, 1961. In 2014 the building underwent a 2.5 million dollar renovation which added geothermal heating and cooling, as well as 98 solar panels on our roof.

Date founded: 9/1/1870

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

1870—First meeting of the Lincoln Unitarian Society at the home of Mary Monell.

1898—Merger of Unitarians and Universalists in Lincoln to form All Soul's Unitarian Church.

Ministry of Rev. Arthur Weatherly: from 1908 to 1920 and again from 1929 to 1942. An influential and dynamic minister who grew the size of church membership significantly, and young peoples' groups flourished. He was an anti-war activist and founder of the Nebraska Peace Society, and also a champion of women's suffrage. He was considered the father of Worker's Compensation law in Nebraska.

1930—Unveiling of the mural entitled "The Search For Truth" by Elizabeth Dolan. She also produced murals for the Nebraska Natural History Museum, the state capital, and the University of Nebraska. The mural was situated behind the pulpit.

1951—The church changes its name from All Souls Unitarian Church to The Unitarian Church of Lincoln.

1960—Members of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln voted unanimously in favor of the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America.

June 1960—Groundbreaking for the current church building at 6300 A Street.

Ministry of Charles Stephen: from 1961-1996. The church's longest-serving minister, known for his powers of writing and oration. A founder of Lincoln's Planned Parenthood chapter as well as the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union.

1991—Establishment of the Interfaith Housing Coalition to purchase and manage two low-income apartment buildings. Member churches are the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, First Plymouth UCC, and St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

1991—Founding of Fresh Start Home, a transitional women's housing facility. The project was spearheaded by Rev. Charles Stephen and several church volunteers, among others.

1997—Designated as a Welcoming Congregation through UUA.

1998—Publication of "The First 100 Years - 1898-1998 The Unitarian Church of Lincoln" by Margaret Seymour.

2000—The Unitarian Church of Lincoln hosted the annual Prairie Star District regional assembly.

2007—Special congregational meeting was held to vote to retain or dismiss Rev. Fritz Hudson. Outcome: 192 votes, 151 to retain, 39 to dismiss, 2 abstentions (See Ministerial History)

2012—Designated as a Green Sanctuary Congregation through UUA.

June 2013—Congregational vote on a capital campaign for church building expansion and renovation project: Outcome: 115 yes votes, 1 no vote, 1 abstention, and 1 "hell yes" vote.

2015—Renovated building rededication service.

December 2019—Last member loan repaid to complete capital campaign for church building expansion and renovation project.

2018—Over fifty members and friends of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln attended the General Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri.

January 2020—Launched a second Sunday morning service due to increased attendance

March 17, 2020—The last service was held in the church building prior to COVID lockdown. Pivoted to online services.

2020—150th Anniversary of Universalist Church founding. Events were held virtually or delayed due to COVID.

Autumn 2021—Returned to in-person Sunday service while still offering live streaming option

2022—Unitarian Church of Lincoln co-founded Justice in Action.

May 2023—the Unitarian Church of Lincoln passed the 8th Principle

September 2024- 27 members and friends participated in the national Climate Justice Revival

July 2025- 4th annual Indigenous Programming month, this year focused on the Otoe-Missouria tribe on whole last chosen homeland the church resides.

August 2025- hearing loop installed

Ministerial History

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2024	Now	Interim	Allen Galazen	Interim Minister
2019	2024	Affiliated	Kimberley Debus	Affiliated Community Minister
2017	2024	Called	Oscar Sinclair	Senior Minister
2015	2017	Interim	The Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods	Interim Minister
2004	2016	Other	M. Jean Heriot	Endorsed Community Minister
2014	2015	Interim	Justin Osterman	Interim Minister
1998	2014	Called	Frederick Hudson	Minister
1997	1998	Interim	Fred Campbell	Interim Minister
1996	1997	Interim	Margaret Keip	Interim Co-Minister
1996	1997	Interim	Fred Keip	Interim Co-Minister
1961	1996	Called	Charles Stephen	Minister
1955	1961	Called	Peter Raible	Minister
1952	1955	Called	Isiah J. Domas	Minister
1947	1952	Called	Philip Schug	Minister
1942	1947	Called	Carl Storm	Minister

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
1929	1942	Called	Arthur Weatherly	Minister
1925	1928	Called	Edwin Palmer	Minister
1920	1925	Called	James Macdonald	Minister
1908	1920	Called	Arthur Weatherly	Minister
1899	1908	Called	Lewis Marsh	Minister
1883	1896	Called	Eben Chapin	Minister
1871	1873	Called	James Garton	Minister

Ministers Emeritus/a

Name	Date Voted Emeritus/a	Year Deceased
Frederick Hudson	3/2/2014	
Charles Stephen	9/1/1996	2017

List non-UU ministers who have served the congregation, including their names, denominational affiliation (if any), and approximate dates of service:

This has not been the case for our congregation.

Recall if a minister with a marginalized identity has served the congregation, and describe how this ministry did go / is going:

From 2015-2017, the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods served our congregation as interim minister. Rev. Dr. Woods is a nonbinary lesbian who was 70 years old when she arrived here. Gretchen came to us immediately after a very difficult time in our congregation with a previous interim (see Additional Ministry History notes below). She was an enormous help to the congregation, providing healing and exceptional leadership to steer us toward our next settled minister. Her ministry with us went very well and she is still beloved by many in our church.

From 2024-2026, Rev. A.J. Galazen is serving our congregation as an interim minister. Rev. A.J. identifies as a gay man. His ministry is going very well, both Rev. A.J. and the Board of Trustees were very excited to renew the contract for a second year.

Additional ministerial history notes:

Reverend Peter S. Raible 1955 - 1960*

Rev. Peter Raible came to Lincoln in December 1955 from the First Unitarian Church of Providence, Rhode Island, where he had been an assistant minister. He belonged to a family of Unitarian ministers. Peter and his wife, Dee, were well-liked by members of the congregation. They were young and enthusiastic. The church membership had become divided during the previous stressful year, but Rev. Raible proved capable of smoothing some of the tensions.

His involvement in community activities mainly involved race relations, and he was twice elected president of the Malone Community Center.

In addition to re-unifying the congregation, he was involved in the discussions about building a new church building. Every detail of the plan was of interest to him, and he worked closely with the architect and the church committees. He took part in the groundbreaking ceremony and in laying the cornerstone on December 11, 1960. However, he never had the opportunity to make use of the church he helped to plan. In October he received a call to the University Unitarian Church in Seattle—his wife Dee's home church. It was a call he couldn't refuse, and the Raible family left Lincoln in January 1961. (Taken from materials gathered for UCL's 150th anniversary display)

* Prior to 2024 with the departure of Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Peter Raible was the last minister in 64 years to leave the Unitarian Church of Lincoln to go to another church. The two other ministers serving within that timespan retired.

In November 2007, a special congregational meeting was held to vote to retain or dismiss Rev. Fritz Hudson. The outcome, based on 192 votes, was 151 to retain, 39 to dismiss, and 2 abstentions. Thirty-six members had signed a petition to dismiss Rev. Hudson (a petition signed by at least 10% of the congregation was required for a congregational vote. Congregational membership stood at 334). The petitioners based this action primarily on their dissatisfaction with Rev. Hudson's handling of a complex situation regarding a congregant who was a registered sex offender and access to the education wing of the church. It was a turbulent time within the congregation and some people did resign from membership. One outcome of the experience was that Nancy Heege and Nancy Combs Morgan of the (then) Prairie Star District conducted a congregational assessment and provided a thorough report which the board used to implement programs such as a constructive conflict workshop and the formation of a self-study committee. That committee visited nearby churches in Ames, Iowa, Omaha, Nebraska, Des

Moines, Iowa and Kansas City, Missouri to learn about programs within those churches and how they dealt with contentious issues. The committee also hosted listening sessions called “Hot Potato Discussions” for congregants to voice their opinions and feelings about upcoming decision points within the church. Rev. Hudson did make positive changes in relating to the congregation and served successfully until his retirement in 2014.

Following the retirement of Rev. Fritz Hudson in 2014, UCL entered an interim period that ultimately lasted three years. In August 2014, the board hired Rev. Dr. Justin Osterman as an interim minister with the expectation of his service during a two-year interim. He left at the end of one year. His time at UCL was difficult in many respects, particularly with staff and church leadership due to his abusive managerial style. (Other churches had similar bad experiences with Rev. Dr. Osterman and he is no longer serving in UU ministry). The Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods was then hired and her nurturing and supportive style of ministry was a great help to those who were hurting. She served from 2015-2017. She spent her first year helping the church to heal and the second year getting the congregation ready for its next settled minister. The experience with Rev. Dr. Osterman broke many bonds of trust both within the congregation and in how several members viewed the UUA. Gretchen Woods helped to build back that trust and the inter-congregational trust has continued to build in the intervening years. Some congregants still experience residual trauma from those experiences a decade ago.

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below comes directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2025	\$383,612	\$458,739	295	38	176-200
2024*	\$322,295	\$486,230	316	56	176-200
2023	\$359,094	\$455,808	253	73	176-200
2022	\$358,998	\$429,042	285	44	151-175

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2021	\$313,625	\$406,815	321	72	176-200
2020	\$353,289	\$411,506	289	81	160
2019	\$331,977	\$397,767	290	96	161
2018	\$330,669	\$384,380	287	93	164
2017	\$328,625	\$367,866	302	103	160
2016	\$298,709	\$337,720	302	99	161

The following notes and/or explanations have been offered by the congregation:

Year	Note/Explanation
2024	<p>Our pledges to the operating budget have fluctuated in the last few years. Sometimes we have addressed this through drawing on reserve funds and utilizing pandemic paycheck protection program funds to ensure staff and minister salary maintenance. Other years we have made special fund drive appeals to members. For our 2024 budget, we were able to bring staff and ministerial salaries to midpoint; however, to develop a balanced budget, we made the difficult decision to reduce staff hours, furlough our minister for three months, and cut programming. Job descriptions were re-evaluated to balance workload with reduced hours. Average Sunday Attendance: 2024—84; 2023—83; 2022—80; 2021—47. Average attendance data from 2021-2024 only includes in-person attendance, not those who watch the live stream or YouTube video at a different time. For 2021, we offered virtual-only services for half the year and hybrid services for the other half. For a deeper dive into our pre- and post-COVID financial journey, see our Documents Packet.</p>

Demographics

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

5-9%

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

10-24%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

Our congregation identifies as (approximately) 30% male, 65% female, 5% nonbinary/genderqueer.

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color?

0

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams?

2

What number of your Board of Trustees identify as people of color?

0

What can you say about the diversity in congregational leadership, now and in the past? How does leadership assure opportunities and on-going support for people with marginalized identities in leadership development practices?

Of the 29 people in current church leadership (Board of Trustees, Program Council, Nominations Committee, committee chairs), 20 identify as female, 8 identify as male, and 1 identifies as non-binary. Two identify as LGBTQ and two identify as persons of color. In the past, congregational leadership has mirrored the congregation as a whole - mostly white, cisgender and straight. We don't have data on individuals in leadership who might have disabilities.

There is no structured leadership development system in the church at this time. Leadership Development committees have formed over the years, the most recent one stopped functioning during COVID and has not been revived. Intentionality in providing opportunities and support for those with marginalized identities currently relies on individuals within the various groups.

Accessibility

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? Yes

Assisted listening system details:

We have assisted listening devices and braille hymnals. A hearing loop system was installed in 2025.

List parts of the building(s) which are accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have disabilities which affect mobility:

Most of our building is accessible by wheelchair including the men's, women's, and gender neutral restrooms and the minister's office. Exceptions are listed in the following question. Chairs with arms are on the ends of each row of chairs in the sanctuary for those who need them. Our sanctuary has chairs rather than pews which can be moved easily to accommodate a wheelchair, motorized wheelchair, or walker.

List parts of the building(s) which are not accessible:

The storeroom and mechanical room and Music Room (used primarily as the Music Director's office and music storage) are in the basement and accessible only by stairs. These rooms were added during the last major renovation and are intended to be served by an elevator but the elevator has not yet been installed. While the storeroom is the church's official tornado shelter, there are accessible interior bathrooms on the main floor that can be used for that purpose. The chancel is up two steps from the accessible floor of the sanctuary. Currently, standing microphones are provided on the floor level of the sanctuary as needed so all can participate in leading the service. Most of the kitchen cupboards would not be accessible to someone in a wheelchair.

Does your building have accessible, automatic exterior doors? Yes

Describe other ways your congregation is working toward being more accessible:

A handrail for the two steps up to the chancel will be installed by the end of 2025.

We very recently began using digital lyric sharing for both guest musician and choir pieces during Sunday services. The lyrics of any piece of music performed is accessible through a QR code displayed on the screen during the piece. Lyrics

can be viewed before, during or after the service.

Microphones are used for all instances where anyone might speak in the sanctuary - Sunday services, congregational meetings and town halls, trainings and workshops. We are not as diligent about providing verbal descriptions for those with visual impairments.

Resources & Programs

List the resources and programs your Congregation used or participated in during the past year:

- Use of Soul Matters packets in both worship, small group ministry, and religious education
- Starting Point classes
- Involvement with General Assembly
- Welcoming Congregation
- Green Sanctuary
- Climate Justice Revival, September 2024
- UU the Vote
- DART Center training
- GS 2030 application
- subscribed to Sing Out Love virtual hymnal
- In-person "Break Barriers, Build Beliefs" workshop

Describe your religious educational programs across the lifespan:

Our religious education curriculum for ages kindergarten through fifth grade uses the Soul Matters religious education resources. By using Soul Matters in our religious education classrooms, the themes of our church services correlate with what children are experiencing in their classes. Our middle school and high school students hold discussions and do a variety of activities through the lens of UU values. Teachers and assistants attend training annually. Attendance in our religious education program fluctuates from week to week, and overall attendance has dropped since the pandemic. We also have offered Our Whole Lives programming for grades kindergarten through high school.

Our preschool and childcare providers read stories reflecting UU values and develop connections with our youngest children through play both in the preschool room and in the connected nature-based playground. All children and youth can

enjoy playing outside on the climbing structure or exploring the church grounds which include a garden, wooded area, and pantry garden where we grow edible plants.

Adult RE opportunities are offered occasionally. There is not a standing adult RE committee or planning group. Our current interim minister has offered adult classes on UU history, "The Bible" by Karen Armstrong, and has held a worship workshop.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs:

We do not currently have a campus ministry program. Our middle school and high school students are part of a group called "Youth in Action" which focuses on community and social justice issues.

Surrounding Community

Describe the character of the surrounding community, including population and demographics:

The "general" character of Lincoln – from exprealty.com - "Often overshadowed by its big-city cousin Omaha, Lincoln stands out on its own merits as a friendly and affordable city with plenty to offer. Living in Lincoln, Nebraska, has many perks, including a diverse economy, a rich arts and culture scene, numerous educational institutions, and abundant outdoor recreational activities."

Demographics: Lincoln is located in Lancaster County and is the state capital of Nebraska. The population of Lincoln in 2025 is 302,814. The 2022 US census counted 291,082 people, 115,930 households, and 67,277 families in Lincoln. The racial makeup was 78.66% (228,956) white, 4.67% (13,605) black or African-American, 0.89% (2,589) Native American, 4.77% (13,871) Asian, 0.07% (196) Pacific Islander, 3.5% (10,175) from other races, and 7.45% (21,690) from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 7.0% (22,321) of the population.

Designated as a "refugee-friendly" city by the U.S. Department of State in the 1970s, the city was the 12th-largest resettlement site per capita in the country by 2000. Refugee Vietnamese, Karen (Burmese ethnic minority), Sudanese, and Yazidi (Iraqi ethnic minority) people, as well as refugees from Iraq, the Middle East, and Afghanistan have resettled in the city. During the 2022-2023 school year, Lincoln Public Schools provided support for more than 3,000 students from 152 countries, who spoke over 100 different languages.

The median age in Nebraska is approximately 36.2 years of age. The ratio of females to males is currently at approximately 50.3% females and 49.7% males.

Housing – from Zillow -the median rent in Lincoln is \$1,211. The average Lincoln home value is \$286,251, up 3.6% over the past year.

Religious preferences across the state: Nebraska weighs in with 75% Christian-based faiths, 4% non-Christian-based faiths, and 20% unaffiliated with any religion. There is one Unitarian Church in Lincoln. Nebraska also has the First and Second Unitarian churches in Omaha, a small fellowship in Kearney (about 130 miles west), and Prairie Vista Unitarian Universalist Church in Scottsbluff (western Nebraska).

Lincoln is home to the University of Nebraska, chartered as a land-grant university on February 15, 1869, to create opportunity for the state of Nebraska. A proud member of the Big Ten Conference, the Big Ten Academic Alliance, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), Nebraska is classified within the Carnegie “R1: Doctoral Universities – Highest Research Activity” category. Lincoln is also home to several liberal arts colleges and a robust community college.

Lincoln Public Schools is the second-largest public school district in Nebraska, renowned for its long-standing legacy of educational excellence and tradition of rigorous academic achievement. The school district is growing and thriving, serving about 42,000 students in more than 60 schools and programs. “Education Equity -The Lincoln Public School District does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, genetic information, citizenship status, or economic status in its programs, activities, and employment.”

Lincoln is known for its strong Republican support, but there are also numerous Democrats and other independent voters who have been making their voices heard over the past few years. There is no shortage of civic engagement as people debate various topics such as healthcare access, economic development, education reform, public safety initiatives, arts funding, infrastructure projects, transportation upgrades, and much more.

Politically, Lancaster County (which contains Lincoln), NE is leaning liberal. In Lancaster County, 52.3% of the people voted Democrat in the last presidential election, 44.6% voted for the Republican Party, and the remaining 3.1% voted

Independent. In the last Presidential election, Lancaster County remained moderately Democratic, 52.3% to 44.6% Lancaster County voted Democratic in 2020, 2016, and 2008, and voted Republican in 2012, 2004, and 2000.

There are 3,077 nonprofit organizations in the greater Lincoln metro area. Combined, these Lincoln metro nonprofits employ 29,283 people, earn more than \$4 billion in revenue each year, and have assets of \$11 billion.

Describe how your Congregation is known/perceived by the larger community:

In 2022, the Unitarian Church of Lincoln (UCL) was a founding member of Justice in Action (JIA), a DART Network affiliated interfaith, grassroots coalition of faith communities in Lancaster County, Nebraska, to harness the power of organized people to address big community problems.

Within JIA, UCL is recognized as a small church that shows up with lots of people! The perception is that Unitarians understand justice differently than some faith communities. The three community issues currently being researched and acted upon are Mental Health Navigation, Adult Pre-Trial Diversion and Pre-Filing Eviction Mediation.

In the broader community, UCL is perceived as a welcoming community partner and a haven for liberal thinking. Living a liberal faith within a conservative state is challenging at times for youth and adults.

The Unitarian Church participates in the local Pride events every year and is recognized as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA. We recently helped start the Faith Alliance, a group of churches who gather to advocate for the LGBTQI+ community. UCL is known for starting and supporting big ideas. Congregants attend public rallies, city council, and county commission meetings. Our social justice and green sanctuary committees educate and motivate congregants to participate in letter-writing campaigns, and advocacy on the local, regional, and state level.

There has been an intentional movement to deepen relationships with both Omaha congregations so that we can discuss leadership and volunteerism, and garner support more quickly for issues that come up in the state legislature.

Describe how the surrounding community shaped your congregation, and how your congregation has shaped the surrounding community:

Lincoln, Nebraska, is a university town and the state capital. Since the church formed in 1870, faculty, staff (and to a small degree, students) of the University of Nebraska have been members and leaders within the congregation. Congregants and ministers have testified at the state capital on behalf of issues that speak to our principles, both for and against proposed legislation. This visible activism has led many to our church and membership.

Historically, Unitarian Church of Lincoln ministers such as Arthur Weatherly, Peter Raible and Charles Stephen have been pivotal in the formation or promotion of organizations like the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, the Nebraska Peace Society, the Malone Center, Lincoln General Hospital and Fresh Start transitional home for women. Recently, the Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair led the congregation in joining Justice in Action (mentioned above). Since Oscar left in 2024, members of the congregation are still active in its work and we show up in force at the Nehemiah rallies. Our church has also been a strong advocate for the Lincoln LGBTQ community for decades. We have sponsored Pride events over the years and until they disbanded recently, PFLAG held its meetings at the church.

Through Share the Plate, our holiday donation collection event, and other giving we have also helped shape the community we share.

Position Basics

Anticipated Start Date: August 2026

Term: Multi-year

Percent Time: 100% Time

Minimum Salary + Housing: \$92,500

Our congregation plans to offer compensation consistent with lived and ministerial experience. We followed all UUA recommendations for compensation and benefits.

Benefits: Self-employment offset tax; Retirement Plan; UUA Health Plan; Disability Coverage; Term Life Insurance; Dental; Professional Expense Allowance

Plan to offer relocation expense reimbursement:

The church is prepared to go up to \$15,000 in relocation expenses.

Information about the draft ministerial agreement:

Our ministerial agreement follows the recommendations of the UUA for salary and benefits. There is no change log.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hwYXr2o3wZEsIdnawcAhkzEqMzO-sW4hCOEKQqYP6i0/edit?tab=t.0>

Questionnaire

How did the last ministry end (or how is it ending)? How is the congregation doing with this time of transition? What momentum would you like to maintain in the next ministry?

Our previous settled ministry gave notice to the congregation in March 2024. For some, the timing of the announcement felt abrupt and many in the church may have been surprised by his departure. His leaving was prefaced by the financial challenges of the church post COVID. At the end of the 2024 Pledge Drive (December 2023), the board trimmed hours to match the reduction in budget. The minister agreed to take a 3-month furlough over the course of a year - in essence a 25% reduction in salary - the same as the other staff. Though our former settled minister hoped to weather the financial lull with us, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair accepted a call to another church, leaving Lincoln July 2024. The congregation moved quickly to search for and hire an interim minister, bringing a recommendation to the board in June. The congregation as a whole is doing well with the transition and trusts our interim minister, the transition team and the search committee.

Maintaining the momentum of social justice work through Justice in Action, climate action work, and continuing the relationship with the Otoe-Missouria tribe and other indigenous people is important to the congregation. Through this transition period and with the support of the interim minister, the LGBTQAI+ Welcoming Committee has been reinvigorated and become more visible within and outside of the church.

What does the congregation hope the minister will focus on in the next ministry partnership?

Based on the congregational survey, the church would like the minister to focus on leading inspiring worship services, then pastoral care, leading the overall ministry of the congregation, fostering a sense of community within the church, including children and youth ministry, and building connections with other UU churches in Nebraska.. Although social justice and climate work are important to the congregation, the minister doesnt need to be a leader for these. Discussions around pastoral care in the focus groups suggested openness to the ministers role in pastoral care could be through partnership with the congregation as well.

Which skills, talents, and interests does the congregation hope the next minister will have?

Across the congregational survey and focus groups, there was a strong consensus for a minister who is an open, empathetic, and compassionate person with a strong sense of humor and good listening skills. In fact, sense of humor was mentioned in every focus group. Many people experience the congregation as a warm and welcoming community that feels like home or a safe haven and they hope the next minister will support and foster that atmosphere. Communication has been mentioned a lot. Consistency in communication is important; both what is being told to different groups, and consistency between what is said from the pulpit and in individual conversations with the minister. We also want the minister to be responsive to the congregation, especially in terms of emails. Other characteristics that were mentioned were flexibility, humility, trustworthiness, kindness, caring and patience.

The congregation sees the minister as the public face of our congregation and there is a desire for the next minister to be visible in the community as has been our tradition, showing up at our social justice and community activities but also connecting to interfaith groups.

Describe the minister's relationship to other paid staff. Who is responsible for hiring and firing other paid staff?

From bylaws: Section 9.3. Rights and Responsibilities of Senior Minister. The senior minister will...as chief of staff, be responsible for the selection, termination, supervision, compensation recommendations, and annual written evaluations of all paid staff.

Our minister directly supervises our administrative director, youth ministry coordinator, membership coordinator and music director. The administrative director oversees the work of the administrative associate and office volunteers. The preschool lead teacher, childcare providers, and Sunday school volunteers are supervised by the youth ministry coordinator.

Staff appreciates a minister who is transparent and follows through on commitments. Communication and relationship building are important as well as timely responsiveness to communications by whatever preferred method. Being respectful of boundaries and treating all staff members equally, and addressing any issues with individual staff members quickly are desired traits. Having a sense of humor and the ability to adjust to changing circumstances (go with the flow) are also seen as important. (staff focus group summary)

Describe the governing structure of the congregation and how the minister is a part of this structure.

The church is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees elected to serve staggered three-year terms.

In conjunction with paid staff, the day-to-day operations are governed by the Program Council. The Program Council is organized into six clusters. The chairs and task organizers within each cluster have their own goals and projects.

From the Bylaws: Section 9.3. Rights and Responsibilities of the Senior Minister. The senior minister will...as an ex-officio member of the board and as a member of the executive committee, participate in long-term planning and budgeting processes.

How does your congregation monitor and evaluate its ministry? What have you learned from your transitional ministry period and search process about your congregation's history of ministry partnerships?

From the bylaws: Section 6.6. Responsibilities (of the Board of Trustees) 2. The following specific responsibilities of the board will not be delegated: b. To establish criteria for and guide evaluation by the congregation of the board, the program council, and the minister at least every three years. Results will be shared with the congregation.

The transitional ministry periods have been positive with one exception which is well-documented in this record. As we have worked with both interim and settled ministers, we have come to understand each of their special gifts and talents and partner together to enrich the congregation. The Covenant of Right Relations dates from our experience with interim minister Dr. Gretchen Woods. With our most recent settled minister, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, we have developed local interfaith partnerships related to social justice.

How do children and youth participate in worship services? How often does your congregation offer intergenerational services?

Children and youth are encouraged to attend worship services if they wish. We have a Time For All Ages (TFAA) story, skit, or activity in the first part of the service, where young and young-at-heart are welcomed to come to the front, but everyone is included. After the TFAA, the congregation sings the kids to their classes, if youth classes are being held that Sunday. We have experimented in the last couple years with an activity table at the front corner of the sanctuary with things for kids to keep busy. We have intergenerational services about every six weeks (6-8 times/year). An intergenerational service might include a one-hour choir that kids are encouraged to join.

Being welcoming to children and youth in the worship service has been an area for growth in our church. Some older congregants still remember child-free services fondly, and would still like the service to consistently be more tailored towards adults, though the number of people who are concerned about this gets smaller every year.

Describe a typical Sunday at the congregation, including the worship service:

Greeters arrive at 9:15 to welcome newcomers and oldcomers. There is a huddle at 9:30 with everyone involved in the service (minister, worship associate, story reader, ushers, musicians/song leaders, trustee announcer, accompanist, A/V personnel, office staff) to go over the order of service. Mic checks with A/V often follow. The accompanist plays transition music starting at 9:45 and the music director leads community singing/learning new songs at 9:50. The service itself begins at 10:00 and generally ends at 11:00. Coffee/social time in the gallery follows, even when there is no actual coffee. A few committees hold their monthly meetings right after the service.

The service itself typically includes opening words for the chalice lighting, sometimes involving children in the chalice lighting words from our RE program. Children are also involved in the Time for All Ages. There is typically a longer reading that ties into the sermon, a meditation time and/or pastoral prayer (though typically not theist oriented), the sermon itself, the offering, 2-3 pieces from a musical performance or choir, 2-3 congregational singing opportunities, and closing words.

Music and singing together (how many hymns in a service is not universally agreed upon) was mentioned as important in almost all focus groups. People enjoy hearing both guest musicians and music from congregant musicians.

The Time for All Ages is important to many but not all of the congregation. In focus groups, some of our older members mentioned that it is one of their favorite parts of the service.

A Joys and Sorrows time has been part of the service in varying forms over the years, until the current interim period. Some congregants dislike the length to which it could go and prefer to not have it and others feel it is an important part of why they attend and mourn its current loss.

Is your congregation designated as a Welcoming Congregation? Please include information on Welcoming Congregation Renewal status.

The Unitarian Church of Lincoln is currently designated as a Welcoming Congregation. The LGBTQIA+ Welcoming Committee is working on the Five Practices of Renewal to maintain a current status. The Unitarian Church of Lincoln has been designated as a Welcoming Congregation since 1997.

Maintaining Welcoming Congregation status is a very high priority for the congregation. The Unitarian Church has been a leader in LGBTQAI+ community since the 1970s. In many ways, we are the de-facto community center, sponsoring and hosting many organizations and events over the years. We have a monthly Coffee House that includes games, snacks and conversation to create an intentional welcoming space for the Lincoln community each month for the past 20 years.

Is your congregation designated as a Green Sanctuary? Are you participating in the Green Sanctuary 2030 process?

The Unitarian Church of Lincoln has been designated as a Green Sanctuary since 2012. The current Green Sanctuary Committee is changing its name to the Climate Action Team. Our church has achieved the Green Sanctuary 2030: Mobilizing for Justice 2025 Recognition by the UUA. See the documents packet for our Climate Action Teams 2025 Action Reports and Request for Recognition to UUA Green Sanctuary 2030.

Does your congregation support our association of congregations through the UUA's Annual Program Fund at the Honor level?

The Unitarian Church of Lincoln has continually been an Honor congregation at least since 1983, when records began to be kept.

How is money raised within the congregation? How does the congregation feel about its stewardship?

Money is raised on an annual basis through the fall pledge campaign and the church auction (items, meals, experiences) in the spring. The church receives bequests as well. The Capital Investment Committee encourages planned giving and also has an Anniversary Fund program whereby members donate a designated amount on the anniversary of their membership. The congregation has become accustomed to a longer pledge campaign season and discussion of the importance of financial stewardship throughout the year. During the pledge drive, several congregants give testimonials on Sunday about what the church means to them and why they give. These are meaningful and always well received. Over the past few years, pledge teams have invested heavily in education about healthy pledge levels for our congregation which has increased awareness, and pledging. Based on survey data and real-time information from our current drive, pledging is on the rise. This upward trend is a source of pride, but fails to rise as quickly as the cost of inflation and health insurance. Even with our clear-eyed acknowledgement of our recent financial challenges, congregants are generally confident about the church's financial stability going forward.

What role does the minister have in stewardship?

Levels of engagement have varied according to the individual minister over the years. Generally, the minister acts as a cheerleader from the pulpit. As part of the executive team, the minister participates in establishing the annual budget. We

briefly had a stewardship team that included the minister, members of the board, financial team and other laypersons. This group was ultimately determined to be redundant with the financial team and pledge teams and was disbanded.

List the ten largest pledges within the congregation:

\$21,600

\$19,176

\$12,000

\$11,000

\$10,100

\$8460

\$8000

\$8000

\$7200

\$7000

Describe any capital campaigns in the congregation in the last ten years and ones which you are planning (if applicable):

June 2013: The congregation votes on a capital campaign for a church building expansion and renovation project including green features such as rooftop solar panels and a geothermal HVAC system. Outcome: 115 yes votes, 1 no vote, 1 abstention and 1 "hell yes" vote.

The capital campaign was for 2.58 million. Funding sources - Union Bank construction loan, sale of church-owned residence adjacent to the church (not parsonage), no-interest member loans and gifts.

Fall 2013: The congregation relocated to an empty United Methodist church during construction.

Spring 2015: Congregation moves back to 6300 A St, renovated building re-dedication service is held.

2016: Union Bank construction loan paid off.

December 2019: Last member loan repaid to complete capital campaign.

There are no current capital campaign plans. The original 2013 renovation plan included adding a sanctuary on the north side of the building. However, given the costs of renovation of the existing structure, a needed administrative wing, plus a sanctuary, the congregation decided to invest available funds in the major renovation of existing space, and a new administrative wing, leaving the sanctuary to a later time. This renovation was a major improvement in space for religious education and meetings, and the frequently used gallery space that serves as the heart of the church building. It is unclear at this time whether a new sanctuary is needed or if it would be a priority for the congregation in a capital campaign.

What debt does the congregation have? How is the debt structured (terms)? Reserves? How are reserves used/accessed?

The church has no debt. The last member loan to fund the most recent renovation was paid off in 2019.

Capital reserves of the church are managed by the Capital Investment Committee. This is a permanent, standing committee that reports directly to the Board of Trustees. Its purpose is to manage financial assets on behalf of the church to increase their worth to benefit the future of the church. Its goal is to ensure the investments reflect church values and manage risk as well as educate the congregation. As directed by the board, the committee disperses funds to support the current or future capital needs of the church and, in rare circumstances, for urgent church needs.

What did you learn from cottage meetings and surveys about your congregation? Any surprises?

The questions we asked in focus groups were revealing and clarifying. Participants shared deep vulnerability, most especially to the question, Why do you stay [at UCL]? Members shared how connected to the church they felt, describing the church as home and where their community resides. Given the median length of membership (20 years), it seems right that members feel deep attachment to the church and each other.

In response to the question, What do you hope never changes?, a large number of people said Nothing! They want us to always be open to change, new experiences, and new ways of doing things. This was really unexpected,

especially when half of our survey respondents were over 70 - we are truly young at heart.

On the 2025 Congregational Survey we asked congregants to tell us in one or two words why a new minister should choose us? Common responses were *community, welcoming, energetic, dedicated, enthusiastic, and ready*. These convey a sense of energy and excitement for our next minister.

Lastly, some focus groups were asked what in our church is a source of pride. Responses included how much we love and support our staff. The positive level of trust in church leadership and the minister was heartening.

The surveys confirmed some assumptions (93% members are of European descent) and some surprising diversity (theology of members ranged from humanist to atheist to Christian to pagan). Survey results showed that over three-fourths of respondents participate in our social justice activities.

Describe how the congregation defines good preaching and worship:

People appreciate when all pieces of the service all go together well, such as all the readings, music, and sermon. They also like it when the logistics of the service go smoothly.

In a 2025 transition team sponsored survey on worship, 81% of respondents said that intergenerational services were very or somewhat important (full worship and music survey reports in documents packet)

The importance of music came up frequently in the focus groups. It is an important point of pride for many and a key reason to come to Sunday Service for many. In a 2025 transition team sponsored survey on music, classical, folk, and jazz ranked high. World music and non-eurocentric music were also mentioned. Many respondents like different styles of music and would like to see more variety. A healthy majority (67%) said they would like to see recorded music less than once a month or never. This is likely a hold-over from the pandemic when that was all there was.

There are a range of preferences in the church along the continuum of lecture to heart-centered and participatory in the Sunday service. This suggests some variety is good. However, even the most-heart centered service that has a message that is intellectually rigorous and consistent with science is likely to be well-received. In focus groups, a service that has a good message that is engaging and makes you think were prominent themes.

What should a prospective minister know about the theologies of the congregation? Where does the congregation find inspiration and comfort?

The 2025 Congregational Survey suggests that most people consider themselves Unitarian Universalist first (73%) and their UU identity is quite important to them. Beyond that there is a significant group who consider themselves agnostic (30%), humanistic (25%), or atheist (20%). Smaller but significant numbers of congregants identify as Buddhist (12%), Christian (11%), Jewish (1.4%), or Hindu (1.4%). There is a significant pagan or other earth-centered presence (11% collectively). The Order of the Red Grail, a local pagan group, uses our church and occasionally leads services such as Winter Solstice.

One growing edge for our congregation is the respect for those who believe in a deity and to be more welcoming of theistic religious thought. We know that there have been Christians over the years who have stopped attending because they didn't feel welcome.

Congregants find inspiration and comfort from many sources. Many express that the music on a Sunday morning, as well as other parts of the service give them inspiration. For those who cannot attend on Sunday or cannot make it to our building anymore, small group ministries such as Open Circles and UU Connect groups done through Zoom bring comfort and connection with others. The church also has a group of people who send cards to those experiencing difficult times.

How does the congregation handle conflict?

The congregation adopted a Covenant of Right Relations in 2017. (See documents packet for text) but has not formed a right relations committee. In conflicts regarding settled minister Rev. Fritz Hudson and interim minister Rev. Justin Osterman (see Ministerial History section of Congregational Information), town hall meetings and listening sessions were facilitated by regional staff regarding Rev. Hudson and interim minister Gretchen Woods regarding Rev. Osterman. These were well attended and while difficult for many, they resulted in greater understanding and depth of trust. The Covenant of Right Relations grew out of the turmoil around Rev. Osterman. The first part of the covenant is displayed in the front hallway of the church but most congregants could not list what it contains. It is invoked and followed in formal, organized settings (e.g. congregational meetings/town halls, board meetings) but has yet to make it into the everyday language of our personal interactions.

In the 2025 congregational survey, nearly everyone indicated that they think the congregation does a good job of keeping conflict at a productive level and staying in good relationship, with all but 6 responses being 3 or higher and three quarters of responses being 4 or 5 (using a 5-point scale with 5 indicating strong agree with positively worded statements).

What is a current source of pride for your congregation?

We show up - for each other and the community, carrying out a long tradition in this church that is itself a source of pride. We are recognized as a group as UUs by others at community events. We are also very proud of our being a Green Sanctuary, Justice in Action, Share the Plate, and LGBTQAI+ Community leadership. Our building and quality and support for music are also sources of pride.

What work is slow, stuck, or left undone within the congregation?

Work that is slow

- raising awareness of microaggressions and respectful use of correct pronouns.
- revitalization of our religious education programs - both for children and adults. The desire for adult RE may need more exploration to determine what is truly wanted by the congregation.

Work that is stuck

- engaged lay leadership and congregational involvement in pastoral care, right relations, leadership development, denominational affairs.
- we are continuously asking for volunteers (often the same people) for tasks instead of reconceptualizing jobs so more people consider doing them. Volunteer recruitment is particularly difficult for roles requiring longer commitment such as chairing a committee or serving on the board.

Work that is undone

- reviewing/updating our mission/vision/covenant (not done with recent bylaws revision).
- establishing an emerging adult and young adult ministry.

What should a prospective minister know about the building and grounds for the congregation?

We renovated our 53-year-old solid masonry building in 2014. Though we could not financially add the sanctuary we desired and had to maintain the auditorium and kitchen as it was, we added 55% to the floor area, from 10,034 sq ft to 16,059 sq ft. Green features of this renovation included 98 solar panels, a geothermal system, a heat pump water heater for the bathrooms, added insulation, LEDs, and new windows, and added rainwater runoff mitigation and drought-resistant landscaping on our grounds. In 2023, we replaced the two gas furnaces that heated our auditorium and kitchen and replaced them with air-source heat pumps and installed a heat-pump water heater for the kitchen. In 2024, we turned off the gas fireplace and became all electric.

The single-level building is in good condition, and is rented frequently by other groups for meetings and events. The grounds include a small wooded area, memorial garden, columbarium, and 56-car parking lot (to be resurfaced in 2027). Overflow parking is provided across the street at a parochial high school. The chancel area has not been updated in some time and feels dated to some. However, the relatively new chairs are attractive and comfortable. The sanctuary holds between 180-200 chairs depending on the configuration.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around pastoral care, spiritual guidance, counseling, and home or hospital visitation?

While it is generally acknowledged that our church size is beyond the capacity of one minister to attend to everyone in the congregation, there are some (particularly older members) who feel the minister should be very involved in hands-on pastoral care. From a 2025 Transition Team survey including pastoral care: When asked whether pastoral care included care from the minister versus lay leader/congregation, more than 60% answered both. Pastoral care was brought up in many focus groups as an important area of focus for the minister. There is no current pastoral care committee. A core group was active until the COVID pandemic and has not reformed. Re-energizing a lay-led pastoral care presence is an area of focus for our current interim minister and would be a ripe opportunity for our new settled minister to take on as well.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around lifespan religious education?

Adult religious education in the congregation has not been robust for the last few years so there is not a heavy expectation of ministerial involvement right now. Past ministers have taught classes on various topics (e.g. UU history, the Christian Bible, sermon development) that have been well attended and well received. Our congregational survey doesn't show a lot of interest for adult RE though classes are well attended when offered. The small groups like Open Circles are more popular though were unsure if this counts as adult RE.

OWL has been offered at various points in the church's history, most recently in 2020 and involved children who were attending UCL as well as children who did not. There is brewing interest from neighboring churches, especially through Faith Alliance, in conducting a collaborative OWL class. In the focus groups, we heard multiple people talk about hopes for a minister to be involved in making youth and young adults feel welcome and valued. Historically, the most common way that youth are involved in church life is through religious education (in whatever form it has taken over the years). This generally has not intersected with adult programming in a "whole church" model.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around committee and task force work?

Aside from participating in board meetings and guiding worship associates, the church has not expected the minister to take a leadership or active participatory role in committee work. We hope the minister would be interested enough in the committees to learn their history, attend on occasion and find ways to support these ministries.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around congregational community building, facilitation skills, coffee hour, and social times?

In the congregational survey and focus groups, many responded that individual interactions with the minister were important for the congregant to feel seen and to establish trust. Coffee hour and social times were mentioned as times for those interactions to occur. The congregation would look to the minister to provide facilitation skills in the context of a particularly contentious town hall meeting, for instance, or as difficult budgetary or personnel decisions would have to be made. Congregational community building would be integral to the duties of the minister. Providing inspiration, encouragement and support of the congregations efforts in all aspects of church life would be an essential skill for a minister to have.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around leadership development?

Leadership development has not been a formal part of our church life for a while. When our last settled minister arrived in 2017, a leadership development committee was formed and presented education on congregational leadership opportunities as well as personal leadership development. The last UUA developed leadership curriculum was presented just as the COVID pandemic started and has not resumed. It is hoped that a new minister, through guidance and inspiration, can breathe life back into that effort.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around membership and membership growth?

Many in our focus groups said that a good Sunday service, particularly a good sermon, was a way to attract new members and keep people attending. Some also acknowledged that it takes more than a good Sunday morning experience to maintain and grow membership. The minister does take part in our Starting Point classes as well as our locally developed "how does the church work?" class called Nuts and Bolts. A minister who is active in the community through social justice or other work that embodies our values would lead the curious to seek out our church community, and hopefully find a home here.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around the congregation's anti-oppression work, social justice work, and social action?

From the 2025 Congregational Survey and focus groups, it is clear that social justice and anti-oppression work is a source of pride and priority for us. We have very strong lay leadership in these areas, particularly Justice in Action, climate change, LGBTQAI+ and indigenous justice. The minister does not need to lead these efforts but it is very important that the minister be supportive and knowledgeable about our work. That support could be showing up at community events with us, incorporating this work into Sunday Services as appropriate, and, occasionally, being the public face of the congregation to speak for the church.

What expectations does the congregation have for a minister around interfaith and community work?

Although not the highest priority perhaps, the congregation appreciates when our minister is involved and visible in interfaith activities. We currently have strong lay interfaith work through Justice in Action and Faith Allyance (welcoming

congregations). However, being connected to other clergy in Lincoln would be seen positively and has often been the case with past ministers.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister's engagement with denominational activities and leadership?

For our congregation, the minister has been the main connection point between the local church and the greater denomination. Over the years, several individuals have participated in regional and national activities and we have benefited from their experiences and knowledge. However, the congregation as a whole does not seem to have a high level of curiosity about regional or national goings-on. This may be a product of our geography. Several individuals also maintain some level of distrust toward the UUA from the 2014-2015 interim experience (see Ministerial History section of Congregational Information). Since General Assembly developed a virtual option, we have had steady delegate representation. A minister with the ability to make national and regional issues and activities come alive to our congregation would be of great benefit to us.

What are your congregation's hopes and expectations for a minister around other areas not already addressed above (such as family and personal life)?

After attending B4, and putting work into examining our own potential biases, our initial reaction to this question was that we didn't have a clear answer. We welcome the ministers as they come to us, with or without spouses/partners, children, pets. We understand that a minister will have a life outside of their work in our shared ministry. We would encourage them to set and maintain reasonable expectations/boundaries to promote a healthy work-life balance.

How is trust in your congregation right now? Historically? Do people trust the minister? Do congregants trust leaders to lead? How can the minister best build trust with the congregation? How could a minister break trust in your congregation?

The trust in the congregation is believed to be good right now, though there are small areas of difference. Some have never questioned whether trust was present or not, while a few members have different experiences with trust at the church, mostly around microaggressions regarding race and trans awareness. People trust the church as a whole, and the interim minister, but a few folks (primarily BIPOC and/or trans) have greater trust in the church as a whole, than with individual members. The trust in the UUA is not as high. Historically, we had a breach of trust with UUA due to an interim placement that has left some of us wary.

The minister can best build trust with the congregation by being consistent, transparent, and authentically themselves. Showing interest and trust in us is also important.

The biggest thing a minister could do to break our trust is treating our staff and members disrespectfully, dishonesty and violating boundaries.

How has your ministry changed since COVID began? Where do you see decline? What have you let go of? Where do you see fresh energy?

The immediate change with COVID was the move from in-person to virtual services. This carried through with other church functions operating virtually, e.g., meetings via Zoom and more use of Google Drive, all of which have continued and lead to more communication and connection. The increased reliance on audio-visual technology has led to improvements in AV capability and its use in services, including lyrics to hymns on an overhead screen as a supplement to the hymnals and greatly improved visuals during the storytime for children. Our services continue to be live-streamed, recorded and archived on our YouTube channel. There continues to be a small percentage of online-only viewers during services; in person participation in Sunday services is slowly resuming. Although many focus group members mentioned they much prefer to attend in person, the streaming option is appreciated and a positive outcome of the pandemic.

Post COVID, we also see a decline in new membership. During COVID, the virtual services and small groups by zoom were good at keeping relationships with existing members, but not as effective in engaging new members. There was a significant drop in new membership in 2022 and 2023, but in the last 12-18 months, the number of new members has been slowly increasing. Since COVID, it has been difficult to recruit members to take on larger volunteer positions, such as committee leaders and Program Council members, though short-term (one-off) volunteer recruitment has stayed about the same.

At the encouragement of our interim minister, we have let go of the joys and sorrows portion of Sunday service where we say our own name or the name of someone we want recognized for a challenging episode or a joy. This has long been a tradition in our church, so it is with trepidation we move this practice to a separate service once a month that is set aside entirely for communal sharing and witness of joys and sorrows. Every so often, we include virtual speakers, something we began during COVID, that allows some members to participate in Sunday services who could not otherwise do so.

Fresh energy is noticeable in our social justice work, in the music program and with the worship associates. Supporting an Afghan family in 2022 and the Justice in Action program are but two examples of an increased attention and activity in issues of social justice. There is much affirmation in this work throughout the congregation. The choir has several new members, and it is a joy to see the congregations reaction to performances with the addition of new voices. The Music Director hired in January 2025 is a dynamic and joyful choir director and song leader. She has introduced the congregation to the new virtual hymnal and folks are enjoying learning the new songs as she leads community singing before the Sunday service starts. Also, the number of worship associates have grown and become a more integral part of Sunday services. The rotation of new voices and reengaged individuals participating has been very positive. We have many talented and articulate people here, and even small changes like occasionally altering the seating arrangement and the addition of a congregational chalice lighting has brought a feeling of renewed energy.

Imagine that, early in the next ministry partnership, a member of your congregation behaves in a way that escalates over time from curmudgeonly criticism to disruptive actions to bullying staff or other members. Keeping in mind your congregation's real experiences, policies, and covenant, how would leaders handle this situation?

Depending upon where the behavior begins and escalates, many of the committees would begin with reminding the person of what we consider respectful interchange (noting pieces of the covenant without formally naming it). If the behavior continues, most committees would likely ask 1-2 people in the committee to speak with the member. Once the behavior becomes disruptive or bullying, the issue would be taken to the Program Council (member to member) and/or the minister (member to staff) where a formal discussion of our covenant would be conducted. If the behavior occurs outside a committee context, it is most likely that the member or staff person impacted directly would take this to the church administrator who would direct the situation to the board or minister. As we write this down, it is evident that we need to move forward on creating a Right Relations Committee to clarify the process, provide training in mediated conversations and a place for this work to be done.

Imagine that someone has a new idea that they think could make a big difference in the ministry of your congregation. Considering your congregation's culture and structure, how does a new idea become implemented and integrated into the ministry of the congregation?

The path for those wishing to implement new ideas and practices has not always been easy or transparent. If the idea falls within an area of the Program Council, then the person could have a conversation with the liaison of that particular cluster about their idea. In this congregation, any idea of change needs to have a champion who can steer the idea through the channels of the Program Council or administrative director or whoever can help make the idea a reality. That path and those channels are not currently well-advertised for anyone to use. The upside is that by the time the idea comes to fruition, it will have broad support within the structures of the church and things like financial and time budgets will have been thought through. The downside is that an individual can become frustrated with the time and thought required to make their idea a reality. This may mean that the church misses opportunities to do new things. Some modest proposals could benefit from a streamlined process. As it is, the process can be exhausting. As the new idea is being tried out within the congregation with the support and encouragement of its champions, the congregation (if the congregation as a whole is involved) will generally be willing to try new things and will adapt to it. Within our governance system, an individual is not able to implement a large idea or project (e.g. a large new sign on the front lawn, starting a prison ministry) by themselves.

There have been some theological divisions and spirited discussions in Unitarian Universalist circles in the last several years about our shared values, how to articulate these values, and what these values call us to do, especially around equity, inclusion, power, and covenantal relationship. Please share some examples of how this is playing out in your congregation.

Our congregation is not involved in the debate on the 5th Principle. We passed the 8th Principle at the Spring Congregational Meeting in May of 2023 by a 98% yes vote, after months of educational programming. This work was guided by a group of people who had been through Within and then Among of the Beloved Conversations program.

Our most evident work around the 8th Principle is the church's summer indigenous programming which began in 2021 with a desire to go beyond crafting a land acknowledgement to include self study and building community with the Otoe-Missouria Tribe in support of their homecoming to their last chosen homeland.

Similarly, in the lead-up to the Article 2 final vote, much time was dedicated from the pulpit to educating the congregation about the context for the proposed changes.

The B4 workshop gave us important insight on our growing edges for bias. A book discussion group for *Seeds of a New Way: Nurturing Authentic & Diverse Religious Leadership* has been proposed for the winter/spring and could turn into a resource for talking about bias and inequitable practices and behaviors in our congregation.

What else would you like potential applicants to know about your congregation?

We have a Wayside Pulpit.

We used to have a zipline.