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# First Universalist Church of Essex

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## Annual Meeting

May 7, 2023

### Annual Meeting Agenda

- 1) Welcome – Ken Swanson
- 2) Opening words – Art McDonald
- 3) Verify meeting is being recorded.
- 4) Review voting procedures.
- 5) Vote in a new trustee:
  - a) Crystal Davis
- 6) Motion to approve candidate(s)
  - a) Ken Swanson, Moderator
  - b) Neil Bassom, Treasurer
  - c) Becky Axelrod, Secretary
- 7) Vote in Trust trustees
  - a) Jen Sauriol
  - b) Ernie Stone
- 8) Financial update – Neil Bassom
  - a) Budget highlights and changes
  - b) The annual Report was sent to the congregation in a church service email.
  - c) Reserve Funds Overview
- 9) Questions

## Letter from your Moderator

Dear members of the First Universalist Church of Essex,

As we gather on May 7th to reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the resilience and dedication of our community. Despite our challenges, we came together to support one another and continue our mission of creating a welcoming and inclusive spiritual home.

One of the significant events of this past year was saying goodbye to Reverend Eva Cameron, who had been an integral part of our community during the pandemic. While her departure was difficult, we were fortunate to have a dedicated Speakers Task Force that aided the Worship Team in bringing us excellent Sunday services throughout the year.

Without a hired minister, the Board of Trustees held three congregational meetings to help plan our future. The first was led by Vicki Diez-Conseco and focused on what we want to prioritize over the coming year. The second meeting determined our minister search strategy, and the last was led by Paul O'Leary and explored ways the congregation could work as a group to achieve common goals. The formation of the Search Team was a significant milestone, and we are grateful for the countless hours they spent analyzing candidates, resulting in the recommendation to the Board of Trustees to hire Reverend Tess Baumberger. We are thrilled to welcome her as our new minister and look forward to the future under her spiritual leadership.

Of course, our dedicated and hardworking staff played a significant role in our success this past year. We are fortunate to have Laurel as our Administrative Assistant, Allison as our Director of Religious Education, Molly as RE Assistant, UBU Director, and Chief Cleaner, Sean as our UBU Assistant, Alexandra as our Music Director, and Ronan and Seamus as our A/V Techies.

Additionally, I am grateful for all the efforts of our many volunteers, including our Board of Trustees, Worship Team, Finance Team, Building Team, Hospitality Team, Music Team (including the choir and band), Community Connections Team, Education Team, Membership Team, and Aesthetics Team.

I am proud of all we have accomplished this past year and grateful for the dedication and commitment of each of you. I look forward to continuing this work together to create a thriving and inclusive spiritual home for all who seek it.

Warmly,

Ken Swanson

## **Finance Committee**

### **Neil Bassom (Treasurer, Chair FinCom)**

**Fiscal Year 2021/22** - Losses in FY21/22 were worse than anticipated. Net operating loss was \$31,300, compared to the loss of ~\$22,700 anticipated in the FY21/22 budget approved at the 2021 May meeting. Expenditures were slightly lower than expected, at ~\$131k vs. \$134k (good agreement with the budget on the expenditure side is expected, given that the (known) Ministerial expenses comprise about 70% of the total.) The more significant discrepancy was on the income side, with an income of \$99k vs. an anticipated \$112k, a deficit of \$13k.

Much of this shortfall is attributable to the fact that we didn't repeat the 'year-end rush,' which in FY20/21 raised ~\$7,900. However, there was a concerning drop-off in donations of about \$5,000. The drop-off in one-time and regular offerings did not occur gradually throughout the year but was concentrated towards the end of the financial year (and continued into the later part of the calendar year 2022).

The balance sheet at the end of FY21/22 (August 2022) follows this page. At year-end, we had ~\$30,000 in the Church checking account and ~\$198,000 in CD and Trust funds, versus ~\$56,000 and ~\$197,000, respectively, the previous year.

Mid-year 2022, we learned that Rev. Cameron would retire on the grounds of ill health. This had no effect on the 2021/22 figures, as under the terms of our agreement with Rev. Cameron, we paid salary and benefits until the end of November 2022 (i.e., into FY22/23). It significantly impacted expectations for the FY22/23 budget, and the forecast was accordingly amended from the budget approved at the May 2022 Annual Meeting.

After revising the budget, we anticipated that we would end FY22/23 with a modest operating surplus but that cash reserves would drop through the calendar year 2022 (as we continued to pay Rev. Cameron's benefits) before recovering. As the checking balance dropped towards the end of the year, we requested and received a transfer of \$10,000 from the Trust Funds in December.

Thanks to some generous one-time gifts, we now anticipate that in FY22/23, we will roughly be break-even to a small (few \$k) loss.

We supported Rev. Cameron's claim for Long Term Disability by providing information and clarifications to the Guardian Insurance Company. We also re-issued previous W-2 tax documents to Rev. Cameron to correct erroneous W-2s, which did not include the Congregation's payments of insurance premiums as imputed taxable Ministerial income, as specified in Eva's Calling Agreement. This correction had no material impact on the Church.

During FY21/22, we received a grant of \$4,000 from the Spinney-Mudge Fund, administered by Greater Lynn UU, to replace the windows and provide squirrel chews. Thanks to Rev. Cameron's efforts, we also received a grant of \$4,700 from the Babson-Webber-Mustard fund to replenish the Minister's Discretionary Fun. Following Eva's departure, this fund has been re-established with Art MacDonald in sole control.

With the appointment of Rev. Tess, we will revert to something closer to the original FY22/23 budget, with a deficit of ~\$21k anticipated in FY23/24. Details are in the proposed 2023/24 budget outlined below for discussion.

FinCom has identified implementing a Planned Giving Program as a goal for 2023.

**First Universalist Church of Essex**

**Balance Sheet**

**31-Aug-22**

	<b>As of Aug 31, 2022</b>	<b>As of Aug 31, 2021</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
<b>Bank Accounts</b>		
Checking	30,125.70	56,265.18
Church CD	42,230.32	42,022.23
Legacy Giving - Building	20,011.04	50,003.26
Legacy Giving - Community	15,004.58	15,001.58
Memorial Fund (Fidelity)	122,130.59	121,953.84
Memorial Fund - Pousland Donation	33,547.28	33,177.31
Minister's Discretionary Acct	1,382.77	1,382.02
PayPal Bank	0.00	3,532.13
<b>Total Bank Accounts</b>	<b>\$ 264,432.28</b>	<b>\$ 323,337.55</b>
<b>Other Current Assets</b>		
Donations Receivable	3,165.00	4,300.00
Prepaid Expenses	400.98	357.25
Receivable - Tyler SJF	256.50	0.00
<b>Total Other Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 3,822.48</b>	<b>\$ 4,657.25</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 268,254.76</b>	<b>\$ 327,994.80</b>
<b>Fixed Assets</b>		
Building Improvements	50,519.50	36,290.99
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>\$ 50,519.50</b>	<b>\$ 36,290.99</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 318,774.26</b>	<b>\$ 364,285.79</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accrued Expenses	2,088.55	3,300.00
Dues Payable	2,000.00	0.00
Payable - Reimburse from Building Fund	0.00	18,650.00
Payable - Reimburse Operating Expense	0.00	1,071.75
Payable - STP	574.01	0.00
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 4,662.56</b>	<b>\$ 23,021.75</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Unrestricted Net Assets	341,264.04	255,846.32
Net Operating Income	-31,329.09	-3,302.28
Net Other Income	4,176.75	88,720.00
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$ 314,111.70</b>	<b>\$ 341,264.04</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$ 318,774.26</b>	<b>\$ 364,285.79</b>

## Notes to Proposed 2023/24 Budget

Four sets of figures are shown on the following page:

- The original FY22/23 budget approved at the 2022 May meeting.
- Revised FY22/23, drawn up when we learned of Eva's impending departure.
- Forecast FY22/23 outcome – best guess, at this point halfway through FY22/23, of what the final FY22/23 figures will be. There is considerable uncertainty/judgment here.
- Proposed FY23/24 budget

The most significant change from the FY22/23 revised budget is the inclusion of salary and benefits for the contract minister to be starting in August. Salary and (most) benefits are increased over Rev. Cameron's level, but Rev. Tess does not require health or dental insurance, a considerable saving.

As income has been slower to recover than was anticipated in the revised FY22/23 budget, the expected income in FY23/24 has been lowered to \$111k from the \$121k of the original FY22/23 budget, though this is still an increase from the \$100k of the revised FY22/23 forecast.

Based on experience this year, it is anticipated that the balance of donations will shift further to one-time donations. An aggressive goal of \$40,000 has been budgeted.

Suggested 4% raises for staff, no changes in hours. This will have a significantly smaller effect on the overall budget than in most years, given that the bulk of the salary budget is for the Minister and has been negotiated separately.

The net effect compared to the revised FY22/23 is that we anticipate income to rise by \$11k, expenses to rise by \$45k (\$41k of which is for ministry), and our anticipated FY22/23 breakeven to become a \$21k loss next year. The split between salary and housing allowance for Rev. Tess may change from that shown, but this will not affect the overall budget.

Overall, the budget proposal for FY23/24 is similar to that presented initially at the May 2022 Annual Meeting for FY22/23. I believe that it reflects our values and priorities.

**First Universalist Church of Essex – Proposed 2023/24 Budget**

	<b>Orig 22/23 Budget</b>	<b>Rev 22/23 Budget</b>	<b>Forecast 22/23</b>	<b>Proposed 23/24</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>INCOME</b>					
<b>Fundraising</b>					
Auction		\$8,200	\$8,200	\$8,500	
Boat Ride		\$5,500	\$8,665	\$5,800	Won't get two rides in FY23/24
Christmas Fair		\$2,000	\$2,845	\$3,000	
Flowers			\$75	\$100	
March Madness		\$2,000		\$2,500	22/23 Forecast assumes some kind of event
Second Saturday			\$100	\$200	
<b>Total Fundraising</b>	<b>\$16,000</b>	<b>\$17,700</b>	<b>\$19,885</b>	<b>\$20,100</b>	
Hospitality		<b>\$360</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	
<b>Offering</b>					New categories this year - focus on totals
Offering - One Time		\$26,124	\$32,000	\$40,000	
Offering - Recurring		\$49,647	\$36,500	\$38,000	
Annual			\$2,500	\$3,000	
Regular Service			\$4,200	\$4,400	
STP - Total			\$3,500	\$3,800	Split The Plate introduced after 22/23 budget
STP - Charity			-\$1,750	-\$1,900	
<b>Total Offering</b>	<b>\$99,092</b>	<b>\$78,771</b>	<b>\$76,950</b>	<b>\$87,300</b>	Revised budget anticipated brisk regrowth
<b>Pledge Drives</b>		<b>\$3,000</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>	<b>\$4,000</b>	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$121,502</b>	<b>\$97,931</b>	<b>\$99,835</b>	<b>\$111,400</b>	
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
<b>A/V Technician</b>		<b>\$780</b>	<b>\$700</b>	<b>\$1,560</b>	\$30 pw
<b>Building Maintenance</b>					
Cleaning Supplies		\$300	\$300	\$320	
Custodial		\$4,800	\$4,400	\$4,576	4% increase
Repair + Maintenance		\$1,398	\$1,100	\$1,200	
<b>Total Maintenance</b>		<b>\$6,498</b>	<b>\$5,800</b>	<b>\$6,096</b>	
<b>Dues</b>					
ECCO		\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,600	At least it's something
UUA		\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	
<b>Total Dues</b>		<b>\$3,000</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>	<b>\$3,100</b>	
<b>Insurance - Building</b>		<b>\$4,800</b>	<b>\$4,800</b>	<b>\$5,300</b>	
<b>Ministry</b>					
Guest Minister		\$3,600	\$3,500	\$2,800	Reduces w/contract Minister but we'll still need to cover ~25 services
Health Benefits		\$7,128	\$5,346	\$0	Health not needed for Rev. Tess
Prof expenses		\$2,500	\$0	\$3,000	
Retirement		\$1,470	\$1,970	\$6,000	Contract Minister for Aug 2023 included in forecast
Salary		\$8,373	\$11,741	\$45,300	Split between salary and housing may shift
Housing		\$7,588	\$7,221	\$14,700	Split between salary and housing may shift
Search Committee		\$3,000	\$500	\$0	
<b>Total Ministry</b>	<b>\$89,130</b>	<b>\$33,659</b>	<b>\$30,278</b>	<b>\$71,800</b>	

First Universalist Church of Essex – Proposed 2023/24 Budget (cont.)

	Orig 22/23 Budget	Rev 22/23 Budget	Forecast 22/23	Proposed 23/24	Remarks
<b>Music</b>					
Director		\$5,000	\$4,400	\$4,576	4% increase
Music Expenses		\$200	\$200	\$200	
Pianist		\$4,150	\$2,900	\$3,016	4% increase
<b>Total Music</b>	<b>\$9,350</b>	<b>\$9,350</b>	<b>\$7,500</b>	<b>\$7,792</b>	
Miscellaneous		\$600	\$300	\$300	
Office Administrator	\$4,770	\$4,776	\$4,900	\$5,096	4% increase in wages/hr, no change in hours
Office Supplies		\$360	\$250	\$250	Not spending it all now
Online payment services					
AFFINIPAY		\$1,200	\$800	\$820	
PayPal			\$20	\$25	
<b>Total Online Services</b>		<b>\$1,200</b>	<b>\$820</b>	<b>\$845</b>	
Accounting Fees		\$960	\$960	\$1,050	
Property Taxes		\$1,600	\$1,600	\$1,700	
<b>Religious Education</b>					
R/E - Wee People		\$1,560	\$1,560	\$1,622	4% increase
R/E - Assistant		\$1,560	\$1,560	\$1,622	4% increase
R/E - Director		\$9,408	\$9,410	\$9,786	4% increase
R/E - Youth Assistant		\$1,308	\$1,310	\$1,362	4% increase
R/E - Youth Director		\$2,940	\$2,940	\$3,058	4% increase
R/E Expenses		\$830	\$600	\$700	
Youth Group Exp		\$1,500	\$450	\$500	
Training		\$500	\$300	\$300	
<b>Total R/E</b>	<b>\$19,606</b>	<b>\$19,606</b>	<b>\$18,130</b>	<b>\$18,951</b>	
<b>Software</b>					
License - Accounting		\$840	\$650	\$680	
License - Fundraising			\$100	\$110	
License - Website		\$840	\$840	\$960	
License - ZOOM			\$100	\$50	
<b>Total Software</b>		<b>\$1,680</b>	<b>\$1,690</b>	<b>\$1,800</b>	
<b>Utilities</b>					
Electricity		\$1,080	\$500	\$1,800	Solar credits expired
Heating Oil		\$2,900	\$2,600	\$2,600	
Internet+Phone		\$2,040	\$2,000	\$1,800	
Water&Sewer		\$640	\$560	\$580	
<b>Total Utilities</b>	<b>\$6,780</b>	<b>\$6,660</b>	<b>\$5,660</b>	<b>\$6,780</b>	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$144,626</b>	<b>\$95,529</b>	<b>\$86,388</b>	<b>\$132,420</b>	
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>-\$23,124</b>	<b>\$2,402</b>	<b>\$13,447</b>	<b>-\$21,020</b>	
<b>Interest Income</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$1,100</b>	<b>\$150</b>	<b>\$150</b>	

## **Nomination Team**

- The Nomination Team comprises Art McDonald, Debbie Frontiero, and Lyn Towne-Smith.
- The Nomination Team recommends Crystal Davis to the Board of Trustees for her 1st term starting September 1st. She has been a long-standing and active member of the congregation.
- The Nomination Team recommends Robin Rogers-Browne and Lyn Towne-Smith for another year to provide stability.
- The Nomination Team recommends Jenn Sauriol continue as a Story and Memorial Fund Trustee.

## **Religious Education**

The RE program has had a successful year. We returned to full-time in-person classes and jumped right into normal programming. Class attendance was variable, with approximately 5-6 kids, ages 4-12, attending consistently. Several high schoolers volunteered to join us on many Sundays, offering an opportunity for multi-age interactions.

As we regained our in-person footing, we focused much of our RE time on connection, allowing the kids to take their time with our opening share time and saving activities for the last part of the class. We have discussed the importance of community and what brings many of us to the UU church. We explored different religious holiday origins, symbols, and traditions. (You may have seen our menorahs, advent wreaths, Islamic crescent, and stars –and more–displayed downstairs throughout the year). In service of others, we produced our annual holiday posters for the Chelsea Soldiers Home (thanks to Mary Carlin, Neil Bassom, and their family). In the spring, we also began a drive to bring in stuffed animals to serve the Salisbury Guinea Pig Sanctuary— a project that required the kids to research the organization and their needs and create a poster to help communicate their goals.

2023 has primarily focused on explaining and engaging in activities focusing on the UU Principles, each week being themed for each principle. As an active group, many of our lessons have incorporated movement, and games, with several art projects interspersed. Through these mechanisms, we have explored the importance of helping others, fairness, and how our small acts of kindness can grow to help create a better world.

## **Spiritual Parenting**

The Spiritual Parents reconvened this Fall after several years of hiatus. This group met monthly (except for one month). Parents gathered for discussion in the Sanctuary and then engaged in a family potluck afterward. Approximately seven families participated in this program, with 3-6 families attending each meeting.

## **UBU**

UBU remains a strong and active part of FUCE. We meet every other week throughout the year at the home of The Goulds. We've seen lots of growth this year, now averaging 8 regular attendees. We've connected around personal growth topics like self-care, values, gratitude, and anxiety... and snacks! We hosted our 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Halloween Walk (but we couldn't have done it without the talent and hard work of Linda Goddard and Liz Raycroft), raked lawns, cleaned up litter, and made over 100 lunch bags for people who experience food and housing insecurity through Ellis Square Friends. Grateful to have Tom Duff serve as a sub! Our year of spiritual and religious exploration culminated with some visits to local faith houses, such as Temple Ahavat Achim and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. Most importantly, we are connecting and sharing so much together, and it's a pleasure to experience the joys of progress in becoming friends.

Always thankful for the support of this community and looking forward to another fun year!

Warmly, Molly Gould and Sean Walsh



## **Music**

This year has felt more like a normal year musically- if such a thing exists. Regardless, music ministry has been active. Alexandra Kirby, Fran Pierce, and Lisa Palance have accompanied services regularly. The band has also resumed regular rehearsals and has led services at least every other month. The adult choir has been rehearsing twice monthly and adding musical flourish to our services. Kazoos proved to be one way to get the children involved in choir music and we hope to improve intergenerational music opportunities. Alexandra donated three new songs (10+ copies) for the choir's repertoire. John Brown and Tom Duff have assisted with music for meditation as well. Roger Pierce has brought joy and music to services as well. Corinne Cothorn joined us for duets on flute at the Christmas and Easter service. Nancy, Peggy, Lindsey, and Jenny also harmonized beautifully at the Christmas eve service.

We have two accompanists on deck in case future service conflicts arise: Andrew Soll and Sanae Kanda. Andrew Soll plans to accompany the service on June 25 on organ.

Music ministry started a "2nd Saturday" open mic featuring a performer each month, which has brought UU and community members together for a couple of hours of fun, music, poetry, and storytelling. We anticipate bringing in some revenue from the sale of refreshments during this event and accept donations. This includes donations for the event and donations (pass-the-hat style) that go to the featured performer. The UU Essex band was featured in January, and the Adult choir will be featured in June. We hope to continue this custom and return all proceeds to the church at least every January and June.

Thanks to Roger Pierce, a One World Coffee House with David Mallett is in the works (to be rescheduled). Thank you to Roger and friends for getting the ball rolling.

The piano is due for tuning, and Alex Marks was going to schedule this with Christine Lovgren if she's available, or we will look into hiring an alternate tuner if needed.

## Building Team

Our building enjoyed another year without any major incidents or issues. *Though, we did have a temporary resident squirrel that managed to do a little damage to the sanctuary window frames.*

The Tyler Building Fund balance as of this writing is \$13,500.

### Large Projects since the last meeting

Name	Total	Funding Source			
		Tyler Fund	Operating	Grant	Donation
Sanctuary Carpet	<b>\$3,800</b>	\$3,800			
New Oven/Outlet	<b>\$1,500</b>	\$1,000	\$500		
New Hot Water Tank	<b>\$900</b>		\$350		\$550
New Windows	<b>\$5,100</b>	\$1,100		\$4,000	
AV Equipment	<b>\$1,100</b>	\$600			\$500

### Repair and maintenance since the last meeting

- New outdoor light outside Hall
- Three-way lighting switches repaired in Hall.
- Wall repair from AV migration to Story Room (aka Crying, AV, etc.)
- Outdoor shed door and lock fix
- Temp fix and cleaning of outdoor sign
- Fire Inspection passed (first inspection in I don't know how long)

### Large Projects in the process

- Hot water tank for Hall bathroom
- New counter and vanity for Hall bathroom
- New counter and backsplash around the new oven
- Sound engineer to EQ Sanctuary
- In-house built acoustic panels for sanctuary to reduce reverb/echo based on EQ results

### Projects going forward for the year ahead for Board consideration.

- Replace two front windows.
- Allocation for Hall to assist potential *Second Saturday* needs.
- Improved lighting (Cupola, Foyer, Stairwell, side entranceway)
- Repair asphalt/walkway issues for both main and side door entranceways
- Repair roof damage on Cupola

### Repair/Improvement for the year ahead

- Further remove cabling from the sanctuary floor with wireless or in-wall
- In-house built storm windows for Hall cellar windows. Thermal/moisture improvement
- Add gutter guards.
- Address rodent issue under altar/organ room.
- Removal of gas lateral and resolving Hall entranceway alongside the driveway

## **Building Team (cont.)**

### Building administration and volunteers

- The routine maintenance schedule is now within the Church calendar system.
- We have a new Google Doc “work list” that reflects the Board Approved, completed, planned, and scheduled efforts.
- Membership. Most are handled by 2 who live 30 minutes away. Another member 10 minutes away joined this year. Someone in Essex would help with the “quick check on things” tasks to avoid long drives and lead time.
- Effort/support is needed to apply for more grant-based funding for larger repair projects.

### Costs

- Post-covid oil use is down to 575 gallons annually from 800 pre-covid (new windows and doors mostly). Yet oil cost per gallon has risen from \$2.75 to \$4.35.
- Electricity use has decreased by about 15% post-covid because of all the LED replacements during the shutdown.
- Internet connection was downgraded to residential from business (reducing monthly from \$275 to \$150) since the hybrid services demand less bandwidth than anticipated.
- Elimination of natural gas bill.

### Electricity Planning

The subsidies are stronger than ever to reduce our carbon footprint further. Three projects will cement this:

- 1- Upgrading electrical service from 100 to 200 amp. Estimated cost \$2,200.
- 2- Going solar: Estimated cost for a system after subsidies are \$10,000. The payback period is estimated at six years.
- 3- Converting to a heat pump. The current oil furnace is 12 years old. The cost to convert to a heat pump is between \$9,000 and \$12,000. Three benefits:
  - a. It will give us central air conditioning as well.
  - b. Will shave a year off the solar panel payback period.
  - c. Will reduce our carbon footprint by 65% or more.

Questions? Comments? Please contact Will Holton or Alex Marks.

## Community Connections Team

Team members: Jenney Harkness, Alexandra Kirby, Brenda Marris, Robin Rogers-Browne, Bethany Swanson

### Background:

Our working team was created in response to discussions at the Fall 2022 congregational meeting on October 23rd. The goal, as identified in that meeting, was to identify current and future opportunities for social activities, experiment with new ideas, and develop approaches to connect with one another, leading to deeper relationships and a more connected community.

The action statement that began the discussion in the meeting was:

*How can we identify the social interests and needs of our community? Are there other creative experiences to connect people and families to bring them together?*

The five of us volunteered to continue the discussion as a working team, with Robin as our liaison to the Board.

### Our ideas:

Our group held its first meeting, mostly to organize, in December, and then had roughly monthly meetings between January and March. We met in the church and Brenda joined us by phone. In our first meetings we brainstormed ideas to increase connection, both within the congregation and to some extent outwardly focused as well. Our initial ideas included:

- Open mic nights (as already planned by Alexandra)
- Craft gatherings (also already underway)
- Skill sharing in various forms - either led by members of the congregation or an outside leader we would invite, anything from tai chi to book club, movie nights, etc
- Re-initiating game nights, with a focus on intergenerational/community-wide participation
- Community dinners or potlucks
- Updating the church directory, ideally with photos
- Enhanced use of social media to advertise activities
- Gaining more advance visibility to the church calendar via the weekly update
- Increased PR in local papers (where they exist) and websites

Following the brainstorming, we then discussed where to focus. Our intent was to expand our current activities without significantly stretching the capacity of the community to do too much, and to ensure there was a leader for each activity. We felt it was important to start with a few items and assess, before filling the calendar. We also thought a survey of the congregation would be beneficial to assess interest.

The items we chose to focus on (and their leaders) were:

1. Second Saturday Open Mic (Alexandra) - and Alexandra agreed to investigate PR opportunities alongside this
2. Community Game Nights (Bethany) - "fourth Fridays"
3. Discuss with the Education group the possibility of a combined survey to assess other interests since ideas like skill sharing and book club.

## Community Connections Team (cont.)

We also agreed to investigate ways that we could update the Directory using data we already have in Wild Apricot. We learned that this is likely possible, and we agreed to wait until later in the Spring (around now!) to take further action, with the intent to prepare for our new minister's arrival.

In addition, we agreed to make more of an effort to ensure that activities were included in the weekly update, which Laurel has been a great help in supporting. Maryanne Askwyth has also supported in highlighting church activities on Facebook. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to both Laurel and Maryanne for their ongoing assistance in keeping us all informed!

We decided to wait on any additional potluck dinners until we could assess interest (via a survey). With a series of auction events from 2022 still happening, plus Spiritual Parenting, and with a new auction in the works, we thought this might provide sufficient activity for the moment.

### **Progress with new activities:**

The **Open Mic events** have been a great success, both in getting FUCE members to attend and also in bringing in other members of the community. It is wonderful to see live music in a community setting again, and big thanks go to Alexandra for organizing this and building broader awareness in the community. The feature acts - musicians, poets, and more - have created real energy, and it has been great to see more experienced performers, as well as first-timers, take our little stage! We look forward to continued events, including upcoming dates on May 13th and June 10th (where the feature "act" will be our very own choir!).

The **Community Game Nights** have seen steady attendance. After starting in January with a 6-8 pm timeslot, but when people mostly showed up after 7, we agreed to shift to 7-9 pm. This allowed us to not worry about food as much and gave families more time to prepare to attend. We have seen a few families consistently and would love to see more people turn out. Some favorite games have emerged, but we are always open to new suggestions. Estelle will gladly take on anyone in a rousing game of Snake Oil, for example. If you don't know what that is, we urge you to attend and have a lesson! The next event is scheduled for Friday, May 26th, 7-9 pm.

### **Next steps:**

We are currently working on finding time for a joint meeting with the Education group to discuss shared opportunities, most specifically the idea of a congregational interest survey. Our goal is to gauge interest in additional activities so we can prioritize our efforts.

In addition, we will begin planning soon for how to get photos of members to put into an updated directory. We may try to leverage the annual picnic to make this happen, though we would likely also provide the option for people to submit their own photos. Please stay tuned for more information on this!

With the imminent arrival of our new minister, we are excited to think about additional activities that will bring us together. We are always open to additional team members and any ideas! Please contact any one of us if you'd like to be involved

Respectfully submitted,

Bethany Swanson on behalf of the team

## **Hospitality Team**

Team members (May 2023): Chair, Becky Axelrod; Jenney Harkness, Lynne Holton, Melanie McDonald, Robin Rogers-Browne and Kathie Woods Person in Charge of Kitchen Safety, Max Schenk

We are delighted to report that the Hospitality Team welcomed a new member, Kathie Woods, this past year. Kathie and Hunter had already been helping in the kitchen on most Sundays before services, and we were very happy when Kathie was able to join our Team officially. We still fondly miss Diana Hughes and Carol Thedford. You would be most welcome if anyone else would like to join our ranks.

It is a huge joy to report that Coffee Hours have resumed inside our fabulously refurbished Church Hall! No more carrying tables and refreshments upstairs and outside. Many thanks to all who helped with that extra effort, team members, and fellow congregants.

We sincerely appreciate the help from the RE parents' group, who provide refreshments every third Sunday of each month. We hope to form other groups to help with this sharing. Please contact Becky or any of our members if you would like to help, even if only occasionally. We try to keep our offerings varied and healthful, but we don't expect more than a modest amount, especially considering the inflated cost of the food we are all experiencing.

Each December, Becky meets with our kitchen safety inspector, Bobbie Cody, and Max Schenk, our authorized and certified Person in Charge. Many thanks to Max for his expert guidance and advice. To stay in compliance with the Essex Board of Health, Max and Becky have complied with a notebook of procedures and guidelines. We continue to provide for those with food allergies and are vigilant to ensure that our food is safe for all. To this end, we have available a list of all the specific ingredients for all food we serve.

Finally, we love helping with coffee, tea, and individually wrapped snacks on each Second Saturday of the month at 4 pm, when Alexandra assembles so many terrific Open Mike performers. There are talents, young and old, from within our congregation and from outside, including many of her contacts in the musical world. So great to have such joy and fun in our church hall again!

Oh, and have I said, please consider joining us?!

Submitted by: Becky Axelrod, Chair of the Hospitality Team

## **Worship Team**

Members: Lindle Willnow, Susan Monahan, Linda Goddard, Becky Axelrod, Mary Carlin, Lacey Rose Dysthe, Jenney Harkness, Sean Moynihan

At the beginning of our past church year, we were dealing with the departure of Eva Cameron, and the burden of leading Sunday services fell primarily on the Worship Committee. Thanks to the efforts of the Speaker Task Force in finding speakers for nearly all services, the Worship Committee would like to report that our services have gone well considering the circumstances. In general, a member of the Worship Committee provided assistance during services by introducing the speakers, making announcements, leading meditation, joys and concerns, and the offertory. Depending on the speaker, the Worship Associate introduced the hymns, led the antiphonal readings, and did the Stories for All Ages. The Committee met monthly to schedule Worship Associates for upcoming services. One of the key achievements of the Committee was to formalize the procedures that each Worship Associate should follow for the weeks they are on. These duties include advance preparations with the Speakers and coordination with Zoom Hosts and Tech Assistants. On Sundays, the Worship Associate should arrive early to help set up, do sound and video checks, and welcome the speaker. After the service, the Worship Associate helps clean up and ensures everything is put away and locked up before leaving. We are very grateful to Reverend Art for filling the pulpit at least once a month. We are looking forward to the upcoming year, working with the Reverend Tess Baumberger, and continuing our coordination with the Speaker Task Force.

In addition to serving as Worship Associates, the Committee discusses aspects of the services that may need modifications occasionally and gauges the congregation's mood to tailor the services to best meet their needs. We are always welcome to new members or anyone who would like to help with the services on occasion. We look forward to gathering again in our wonderful space in Essex, especially with all the renovations going on. Respectfully submitted,

The FUCE Worship Committee  
Lindle Willnow, Chair

## **Health & Safety Team**

Members: Lyn Towne- Smith, Spencer Amesbury, MD, Max Schenck

We constantly watch the Covid Act Now website with all the Massachusetts updates. We also watch the wastewater reports that some cities and towns do. These monitor how much of the virus is in wastewater.

We have updated our Covid Covenant to reflect the positive direction the county is moving in. The Health and Safety Committee maintains regular emails and meets monthly to discuss any changes to the covenant.

Our recommendation currently is not to change the Covid Covenant.

We want to add members to our team, especially if you have in-depth knowledge of fire safety. We would love to have you join the team.

Lyn

Health and Safety Committee

## **PFLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians, Asexual, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Pansexual, Queer, and Questioning**

Our support group for parents has continued to meet throughout the year. We appreciate the support from the church providing meeting space, zoom technology, and now hybrid technology for mixed meetings in person and remotely. Some long-term participants find that their situation keeps changing, and they may move from supporter back to supported. Our largest meeting had 13 participants on Zoom, but 8 is typical as people balance this with other demands. There's a strong core of experienced parents who do so much for each other by showing up and listening, sympathizing, and sharing.

There have been a lot of improvements in the time we've been hosting this support group, but 2023 brings a lot of hate, ill will, and misguided laws in states around this country. The progress made when gay marriage was legalized now followed by real antagonism in many states - banning conversation, books, and healthcare. It is a stressful time for parents - even those that live in the liberal state of Massachusetts - because the news from the country suggests that people won't be welcome in many parts of our country.

My role (Tom) in this group is to open the doors and welcome the people, but I have learned much about the power of conversation and togetherness. I consider it a testimony to our Unitarian message, which teaches "all are welcome" and encourages us to get out and make them feel welcome.

Tom & Melanie

## **ECCO**

ECCO (Essex County Community Organization) has remained active. We are committed to being led by the people who are "closest to the pain" in our quest for a more just society where all can lead productive, safe, and dignified lives.

Taking the lead from our black and Latino members, we have embarked on a campaign to increase the availability of affordable housing in our county. This has involved a campaign to raise awareness in our communities and bring the issue of housing scarcity and insecurity into public awareness. Each local community has formed housing advocacy groups that meet their specific needs. This includes working on changing some zoning regulations, working with communities on their regulation of developers, increasing the funding for housing assistance programs, and mobilizing people in their communities to advocate for the rights of low and moderate-income people. In addition, we are beginning work within each community affected by the state's new regulation of "transit-oriented districts"(TODs) to ensure that the housing being developed to meet the new regulations includes affordable units.

Respectfully submitted, Debbie Frontiero



## Split the Plate

Our Splitting continues to be a great success. All amounts collected will be matched from the Tyler Social Justice Fund up to \$500. Each month the Board of Trustees selects a worthy charity that one of our congregation members has recommended.

As seen in the table below, these Sundays have raised \$1,727 for the church and \$3,456 for the sponsored charities this church year so far. If you know of a charity that you feel is special to you and would like to recommend it for a future month, please contact Liz Raycroft or Ken Swanson.

### Split-the-plate Summary

Month	Organization	Member	Amount Raised for Church	Amount Raised for Charity
September	NAGLY'S for GLBTQ	Laurel Charette	266	532
October	HAWC	Maryanne Askwyth	68	136
November	World Central Kitchen	Ken Swanson	105	211
December	POTS	Liz Raycroft	215	430
Christmas Eve	MASS Peace Action	Art MacDonald	256	512
January	North Shore Health Project	Lacey Rose Dysthe	215	430
February	Annunciation House	Barbara Corning Davis	231	463
March	Cure CMTJ4	Tom Duff	371	742
April				
May				
June				
Totals			1,727	3,456

## **The Grace Center – Fifth Friday initiative**

As most of you know, the Grace Center is a day shelter that, for over ten years, has been housed in the basement of the Universalist Church in Gloucester. However, the program has moved to a separate site at 264 Main Street. The recent opening provided some challenges, with a significant plumbing issue and a stove that was malfunctioning at first, but a more normal routine has now been established. The new site has shower facilities, which the UU church lacked. The program still provides shelter from 8 am to 4 pm, serving breakfast and lunch to individuals who live in the nearby homeless shelter or need food assistance. Additional social services are targeted to the guests' specific needs.

If you would be interested in helping as a volunteer, there are shifts on Monday through Friday from 8 am to 12 noon and from 12 noon to 4:00 pm. In the morning, volunteers make breakfast and lunch; in the afternoon, they serve and clean up from lunch and can mingle with the guests.

Throughout the pandemic, the GC has been vigilant about protecting everyone. They have provided onsite vaccinations and testing for both guests and staff and have enforced the proper wearing of masks by everyone. All kitchen work is done in accordance with Serve Safe guidelines and procedures.

Several of our church members have volunteered at the Grace Center, but Diana Hughes had an additional vision that our church would provide lunch on the last Friday of each calendar month when there are five Fridays, which happens four times a year. We maintain this Fifth Friday tradition by ordering baked haddock from the Causeway Restaurant and making the rest of the meal.

Many thanks to our congregation for contributing to this Fifth Friday tradition by donating money or making part of the meals. Again, please consider visiting and volunteering at the Grace Center. Frank Freedman, who coordinates the volunteers and oversees the program, is a remarkably dedicated and a gem to work with.

Becky Axelrod, Grace Center volunteer



Our mission at Lifebridge North Shore is to support homeless and vulnerable individuals in our communities by establishing access to resources that provide safety and promote healthy physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional development.

10 Church Street  
Gloucester, MA 01930  
978-675-6240  
[www.lifebridgenorthshore.org](http://www.lifebridgenorthshore.org)

The Grace Center Gloucester is our day resource center serving individuals in need of a safe and supportive environment.

### **Impact – “Meeting People Where They Are At”**

- Those in need of day services – using the restroom, getting a meal, seeking a safe place to get off their feet
- Older or disabled adults, isolated neighbors who seek hospitality and community
- Recently transitioned out of homelessness and seeking resources to stay housed

### **Services**

- Breakfast & Lunch Daily
- Restrooms
- Personal care item distribution
- Case management and referrals to our partner agencies for mental health and substance abuse treatment, medical care, job training, identification, housing, and more
- Programs including meditation, self defense, writing, therapeutic arts and music

### **Responding To The Needs During A Pandemic**

- Once the pandemic started, we moved the Grace Center from our usual location at The Unitarian Universalist Church where we were only able to safely serve 25 people because of physical distancing. Due to the increased need of seeing 50-60 people a day, we re-located to The Gloucester House Restaurant function space for winter, 2021.
- Helping to navigate telehealth
- Providing personal protection materials, temperature screenings and Covid testing

### **Ways To Help**

- Donate online or by mail
- Food, personal care items, and medical supplies are greatly appreciated
- Help in our meals program
- Share your expertise by teaching a workshop