

UUCSC Board of Directors Meeting

January 8, 2026

Present: President Amber Collins, VP Russell Stokes, Treasurer Karen Ellsworth, Clerk Mary Fulton, Directors Donna Caldwell, Chris Johnson, Rev. Denis Paul

Absent: April Ruedaflores

Call to Order: 10:00 am by Amber Collins

MOTION: Donna moves to ratify the December minutes.

PASSED unanimously.

MOTION: Chris moves to accept the staff reports.

PASSED unanimously.

Treasurer and Staff reports are appended.

MOTION: Russell moves to authorize the Treasurer to contract with an insurance carrier before January 19 for general liability, property, worker's compensation, and umbrella coverage for 2026-2027. Our Church Mutual policies will expire before the next Board meeting.

PASSED unanimously.

MOTION: Amber moves that the proposed procedure for preparation and approval of an annual ministerial letter of agreement as presented below be made a Board policy.

Passed unanimously.

Procedure for preparation and approval of an annual ministerial letter of agreement

The annual ministerial letter of agreement is the document by which the Congregation retains its Minister. The letter of agreement spells out the responsibilities of the Minister and the Congregation, and establishes the Minister's terms of employment, including compensation. The Committee on Ministry is responsible for coordinating the process by which the ministerial letter of agreement is drafted, reviewed, and signed.

No later than March 1 of each year, the Committee on Ministry will convene a group of Congregation members who will be responsible for drafting and negotiating the letter of agreement. The group, which should be no fewer than four people and no more than seven people, may be composed of representatives from the Board of Directors, the Finance Committee, the Personnel Committee, and the Committee on Ministry. Other

members of the Congregation who have expertise that would assist the group in its task may also be asked to participate.

The group will prepare a preliminary draft of the letter, meet with the Minister to reach agreement on the terms, and present a proposed letter of agreement to the Committee on Ministry. No later than May 1, the Committee on Ministry will recommend a letter of agreement to the Board of Directors.

After the Board of Directors and the Minister have approved the letter of agreement, the Minister, the President of the Board, and the Treasurer will execute the letter of agreement in two identical counterparts.

Facilities Use policy: The Board received a revised document and an application form via email before the meeting so questions could be received and more revisions made if required. Most of the questions were related to possible use of the downstairs rooms. The policy will be revisited in February. There was discussion as to whether or not the alcohol use policy should be reviewed. A suggestion to revisit the alcohol policy will be forwarded to the Committee on Ministry (COM).

Capital Campaign:

MOTION: Russell moves to approve the use of funds remaining from the 2017 Capital Campaign following the recommendations of the Finance Committee.

PASSED unanimously.

The Finance Committee recommends that before a capital campaign takes place, the Board of Directors should ask the Facilities Committee to arrange for a professional assessment of the capital improvements needed for the building and the estimated cost of the improvements, ranked in order of urgency. The committee should determine an individual or firm best suited to undertake this work, based on experience, qualifications, and price, and make a recommendation to the Board. To pay for the professional assessment, the Board should use the funds remaining from the congregation's 2017 capital campaign. Those funds now total about \$6,000. Any part of the funds not expended on the professional assessment should be transferred to the new capital campaign fund.

MOTION: Amber moves that both the proposed amendments to the UUCSC bylaws and a summary of the proposed amendments for distribution to the congregation be approved.

PASSED unanimously.

Board members discussed a date for the special congregation business meeting to consider the bylaw amendments. February 15 was suggested, but the Committee on Ministry is conducting the service that day and might object to the distraction. Rev. Denis said that he would speak to the COM about the date. Proper notification of the meeting will go out at least 2 weeks before the meeting in a variety of formats. People will be encouraged to ask questions before the business meeting so that consensus can be reached smoothly on 2/15.

Communication with the congregation:

Instead of doing the Welcome and announcements during the Sunday services, Board members will lead the recitation of the covenant.

February 1 – Donna

February 8 - Karen

New Business:

MOTION: Karen moves that the Finance committee be asked to include in a line item for child care that would be available for a variety reasons.

PASSED unanimously.

Adjourned 11:30.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Fulton, Clerk

Treasurer and Staff Reports

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County
Treasurer=s Report
for the January 8, 2026 UUCSC Board of Directors meeting**

Budget summary

As of Monday, January 5, I have not received a current income and expenditure spreadsheet from Mary Alice. If I receive one within the next two weeks, I will forward it to you.

Property and casualty insurance

As you know, our Church Mutual general liability, property, workers= compensation, and umbrella insurance policies expire on Jan. 19. As of Monday, January 5, we have received

renewal policies for the general liability, property, and workers= compensation insurance for 2026-2027. I have asked Sara to double-check to see if she received an umbrella policy. These are the current and new premiums:

	2025-2026	2026-2027
General liability and property	\$7,180	\$8,082
Workers= compensation	\$741	\$705
Umbrella	\$750	\$750

Because of numerous complaints about Church Mutual=s high premiums and poor customer service, the UUA=s Church Staff Finances office is looking for a new insurance carrier to recommend to congregations. However, that selection probably will not take place until February at the earliest. If we renew the Church Mutual policies, we probably will not be able to switch carriers later in the year without paying a penalty. If we allow our Church Mutual policies to expire, we will be without coverage for at least several weeks.

Last month, I contacted Hugh Dennis, the UUA=s Director of Insurance Plan Services, to see if he had any suggestions for how to handle that gap in coverage. He offered to help us find another carrier. I have not heard from him this month. On January 4, I sent him an email reminding him that our policies expire on January 19.

It appears that the congregation may have to make a choice about insurance carriers before the next Board meeting. Therefore, I am suggesting that you give me the authority to contract with an insurance carrierC either Church Mutual or another oneC at premiums no greater than the ones currently proposed by Church Mutual for 2026-2027. I will not exercise that authority unless it becomes necessary.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Ellsworth
UUCSC Treasurer

Minister's Report to the Board of Directors
UU Congregation of South County
Rev. Denis Paul

January 6, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Directors,

Following are my thoughts on different areas of ministry since my last report:

Worship Life

- 12/7 “Extra-Ordinary Time,” with Lee Cowan
- 12/14 “Work, Bless, Rest,” with Sky Kimball filling in for Lee
- 12/23 “The Art of the Manger,” Christmas Eve with Lee Cowan, Ami Pienknagura, Penny Hall and Michelle Stage

December was a whirlwind in the sanctuary. Chalice Days felt like an *event* this year with the decorations in the sanctuary, our special dinner, and two services jam-packed with music and “time-honored traditions” that we keep inventing. Folks are celebrating at home, and the rituals are adding to our congregational life. I especially loved it that the 7-pointed star at the front of the sanctaury was build entirely by children and youth, and that they decorated the bulletin board in the Oneto Room.

Christmas had a significantly different air about it this year compared to years past, with more singing together, a decorated tree in the sanctuary, and more children participating with their families.

Congregational Life

The Committee on Ministry is planning two, 2-hour facilitated conversations called “Roots and Wings,” to take place beginning at 10 am. We’ll begin and end with the usual worship rituals, but spend most of the time in conversation: deeply sharing and deeply listening. We are facing big issues of long term sustainability, especially in regards to membership growth and leadership development. Often, our struggles with both are described as an “upstairs/ downstairs” divide. My feeling is that the issue is deeper than generational or locational. The issue is that we never really have the chance to be all together, listening, seeing ourselves in each other, building compassion and connection. These conversations will be a chance to really lift up our commonalities, to remind ourselves that we all want to be a healthy community with a positive impact on each other and the world.

The next big fundraiser, the auction, is scheduled for January 31, with great offerings, entertainment, food and a beer/wine/zero-proof bar. Meanwhile, the Stewardship Committee is thinking about new ways to engage and inform the whole congregation about WHY we pledge, while expanding our ways of paying as well as our pledge base. The hope is to welcome in folks who’ve not been part of the process in the past. The ways in which money is used to express values is shifting, and we are trying to keep up.

Community Life

During December, Rhode Island was hit with the biggest tragedy it has faced in years: the mass shooting at Brown, and the associated murder of a Professor at MIT three days later. The following Thursday evening, I attended an interfaith candlelight vigil at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church on The Brown Campus. The main speakers were perfect for the occasion, which was somber but hopeful, even as police continued the search for the suspect, and the connection between the two events was not yet public. Before the event, I was interviewed by WVCB in Boston, and included in the news story that evening and the following morning.

<https://youtu.be/7o7LvtGLvJY?si=TJ0sGS45hXehu1Jd>

It's a silly thing, but it reminded me of the days in California, during seminary, when I could get myself on the news once or twice a month showing up for social justice events. The key is making the time to be there, which is a bit more difficult with many meetings, a commute, and family life.

Housekeeping

Monday is my regular sabbath.

My next furlough week is January 20-25, during which time I will be at home and available by phone or email in the case of an emergency.

Since my last report, I have made no disbursements from the Agape Fund, and \$1,011 were collected on Christmas Eve Eve, which will go a long way in the coming months.

In Peace,
Rev. Denis Paul

Office Administrator Board Report, January 2026

Week off

Many thanks to Etta for taking care of the newsletter and website the week in between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Insurance

I coordinated with Karen Ellsworth to assemble all the documents related to our Church Mutual Insurance

Christmas Eve Eve

I produced materials for the annual Christmas Eve Eve celebration

Auction

I have started providing support to the organizers of the Auction fundraising event later this month.

Ongoing

I continue to work with Etta on the newsletter and website, and to take care of the mail, email and phone messages. I continue to produce the weekly order of service and the monthly announcements insert, and to deliver the food donations to the Johnnycake Center.

Best,

Sara Kaplow
Office Administrator

**Director of Faith Exploration, Lee Cowan
Report to the Board of Directors
UU Congregation of South County**

January 8th, 2026

Dear Board,

It was wonderful to be all together for so many services in December. The first Chalice Days service we unveiled our Chalice Days dance to "This Is Me" from the Greatest Showman, but I was sick the second Sunday of Chalice Days and was so sad to miss that special service. We had our Chalice Days dinner, highlighting bean dishes, which was delicious. It's great when new people step up to make a dish or a buffet item, so I was grateful that Kari Kurto agreed to make the white bean and kale soup. And for the third Sunday of December we had our winter solstice service with a new play from the kids. I loved that service so much. We had solstice crafts during coffee hour and caroling karaoke in the sanctuary. What a fun day. Then as the sun was going down, we had a small and sweet solstice spiral labyrinth walk with spiced tea and cookies. Such a lovely way to close out the year.

Christmas Eve Eve was wonderful! Cheers to Ami and the choir for making such beautiful music that we could all sing along with.

I'm getting ready to start my Reflection Circles on January 27th. I have 1-2 more spots left if anyone wants to join. They will be every Tuesday for 8 weeks from 1-2:30pm.

Thank you to the four adult mentors who have agreed to meet with our 8th and 9th graders for our Coming of Age program. I can't wait to see what they decide to do together. Rev. Denis and I will also be meeting with the youth once a month to dig deeper into big questions together.

Wednesday DnD has turned back into a full family hang out and potluck. Anyone is welcome to join us starting at 4pm and going until about 7pm.

We are hiring Julien Roberts as a new RE staff person! Since Suzelle is moving to Washington DC and Elise is not available right now, we needed someone and Julien is a perfect fit. Ideally we would also have a third person in RE so that we can have two in the nursery and one assisting me. So if anyone knows of someone who would like to fill that role, please let me know. We also welcome volunteers to come hang out in the nursery or in our circle time!

While in Boulder I attended the worship service at the UU Church of Boulder. It was lovely and I had a great conversation with the DRE there. She has some innovative ways of offering OWL, which I'm excited to learn more about.

Lots of love,
Lee