

UUCSC Board of Directors Meeting

March 12, 2026

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

Call to Order: 10:05 am by Amber Collins

MOTION: Mary moves to ratify the February minutes.

PASSED unanimously.

MOTION: Mary moves to ratify the minutes of the February 22nd congregational business meeting to amend the bylaws.

PASSED unanimously.

Treasurer and Staff reports are appended.

Reports: Nominating is considering potential leaders.

Coordinating Council: Russell reported that Facilities is seeking estimates to assess the needs of the building. is seeking an engineering or architectural firm to make an assessment of the capital needs of the building. So far, the bids for the assessment have come in at about \$4,500. The possibility of a capital campaign has been mentioned.

Digging deeper assessment group: Group members are conducting interviews with members of the congregation to gain further clarity about the 3 main questions discussed at the "Roots and Wings" conversation that took place during the Sunday service on February 15. The 3 main congregational challenges seem to be: 1. Long term sustainability financial related to fiancé and membership 2. Our organizational structure 3. An apparent disconnect between different groups within the congregation. The goal of the interviews is to provide feedback to the COM by early May. Donna brought questions about membership and pledges. The interconnectedness of membership and financial stability was discussed.

Amber, Mary and Donna were assigned to seek information regarding pledging and attendance for the group.

Condo: The cost of snow removal was twice what was anticipated due to the severity of the blizzard.

Fundraising: Barbara Nowicki has donated a quilt that will be raffled. Rev. Denis will ask a recommended person to organize the raffle since there is no longer a fundraising committee. Trish Hindley has done a great deal of work for the congregation over the past 4 years and has now stepped down from her role as the main organizer.

Committees: Restructuring was discussed with the understanding that many elements need to be balanced, therefore a thoughtful process will require time to create a system that works well. A suggestion by Bethany Sorentino was reviewed as a possible starting point.

Anonymous communication: Submissions to the idea box can be anonymous, as Rev. Denis mentioned during the most recent Sunday service, but it is preferable that they be signed so that communication can be directed to the appropriate people. Proactive positive thoughts are desired.

Key code for the ramp door: A meeting with The Lock Shop is planned to discuss how to change the event code. Many people use this code and the door has been left unlocked a few times recently.

MOTION: Donna moves to approve the Appendix B to the Facilities Use Guidelines.

PASSED unanimously.

Adjourned 11:30.

Respectfully submitted

Mary Fulton, Clerk





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

March 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Board of Directors,

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

Worship Life

2/8 "Give Them a T," with Lee Cowan and Ami Pienknagura: CANCELLED

2/15 "Roots and Wings Conversation," with Lee Cowan and the Committee on Ministry

3/1 "Clearer than the Windshield"

On February 8, Super Bowl Sunday, your program staff had great plans for celebrating all of you volunteers during the service with team cheers and tailgate party style chili lunch, even giving away a big chocolate football as a special prize. We cooked for days. And then it snowed and the temperatures dropped to dangerous levels. It made zero sense to continue with a small turnout, so we had to cancel, freeze the food, and serve it the following week after the Roots and Wings Conversation. The big lesson I relearned is not to plan a service that requires a large turnout during winter storm season.

Lesson learned. But at least the food was eaten and the football was enjoyed by the kiddos of the Coming of Age program.

On March 8, I had not been on the calendar to preach but took over responsibility for that — fairly last minute — because Adria was recuperating from emergency surgery. I revisited a sermon I gave more than 7 years ago at my last congregation, something I haven't done in years. It amazes me how evergreen some sermons can be, how much the theme and message still felt relevant. And I don't love doing that. But it worked.

Congregational Life

The Committee on Ministry led the worship service on February 15, turning

over the role of facilitating to Lee and me. The feedback we got is that the format was effective and worthwhile, though I veered from the plan at the very end, as I got caught up in the energy to take action now. Really, what we needed at the point, was a chance to (as planned) sum up what was said, take some time for reflection, then regroup and come up with a plan of action. Instead, we got two action teams, which I am called RESEARCH (looking into what is available in terms of consultants, facilitators, UUA guidance, or educational opportunities for our congregants); and ASSESSMENT (figuring out how to name, frame, and better understand how that the identified issues are inter-related). In my mind, we don't have to hire someone, but it's good to know what it might cost, as we figure out what other resources are available to help us on the journey. And, whether we hire someone or not, we must begin with an assessment of the issues at hand, if we are to get at the core challenge. Meanwhile, the COM has implemented an idea box. Congregants can put any idea into the box, anonymously if they wish. The COM will be in touch with anyone who signs their idea. The ideas can be passed along to the appropriate action group.

Community Life

Last week, Lee and I attended a shortened version of the observer training being hosted by the RI Council of Churches across the state, for helping congregations (clergy and lay people alike) be better prepared for ICE invasion or protests. Before I even got a chance to talk to our Social Justice council about hosting one of those trainings here, Cathy was already in touch with the Council, and it's in the works!

Folks from Social Justice, RE, Share the Plate and worship met last week to talk about implementing a new monthly food collection as part of our worship. We thought it best to include the children in RE, so we'll be doing that on the FIRST Sunday of each month, and moving the Share the Plate Collection to the LAST Sunday of each month. More information to follow.

Housekeeping

Monday is my regular sabbath.

My next furlough week is March 17-22, when I will be home and available in an emergency.

Since my last report, I have made no disbursements from the Agape Fund.

In Peace,
Rev. Denis Paul

Director of Faith Exploration, Lee Cowan
Report to the Board of Directors
UU Congregation of South County
March 9th, 2026

Dear Board,

We had 21 kids in RE this past Sunday! I've been drawing from the Soul Matters materials almost every week, using their Wonder Box activities, stories and activities. We've been having a lot of fun and also having really deep discussions.

We had our second meeting with the **Coming of Age** kids and their mentors at the beginning of this month. We talked about prayer and what our ideas of prayer were as kids and how/if those have changed. I think everyone's ideas about prayer were expanded at least a little and we all made a set of UU prayer beads. We plan to meet two more times and then they will be part of leading a service on May 31st.

A big thank you to Ezra Collins for leading our first UU **DnD campaign for elementary aged kids**. And thank you to Andrew White for supporting him. The younger kids had an absolute blast. Benjamin was actually jumping up and down while telling me about it. Their plan is to run DnD on the evenings that the book club meets. It was such a vibrant scene last Tuesday! We had three rooms of people, of all different ages, engaging in meaningful connection together. It's on nights like that that the congregation really feels like it's thriving.

I attended two trainings this past month: a **Spiritual Care Training** called The Balm of Mutuality and an **ICE training** in a congregational setting. The first was offered through Sanctuary Boston and led by Amelia Catone. I was able to go to it in person, which was fabulous. It was a very grounding time of discussing how to care for ourselves while also caring for others. The second was offered through the Rhode Island State Council of Churches and led by someone from the Lawyers Committee of RI. It was full of really good information about what to do if ICE comes to our congregation.

We had our second annual **Old-Timey Dance** which really is one of the most joyful things around. We brought in \$90 of donations, even though the dance was advertised as free. And huge thank you to Harry Buffum for bringing the Peace Dale String Band and also paying for our dance caller!

We had our first **Wunder Academy meeting** of the year and generated a lot of great ideas! We decided the theme this year will be "Community is Powerful" and each day a different justice workshop will focus on things like shelter (and building our own forts!), food security, protecting the environment, preparing for the future and celebrating together. Anyone who's interested in details or volunteering should just email me and I'll loop you in.

Lots of love, Lee

Office Administrator Board Report, March 12, 2026

Fundraisers

I provided support to the organizers of the Community Dance last month and the upcoming Zydeco Dance event later this month.

Stewardship and Finance

I printed envelopes for the annual letters for the finance committee and mailed those letters which were not picked up at services. I had a preliminary conversation with Sky Kimball about running the upcoming Stewardship campaign.

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.

Retirement

I will meet with members of the personnel committee this week to discuss how the job has changed in the years that I have been here. Just to clarify, because I have heard different things from different people, this is my position: I am willing to stay until the end of the summer. If you find the perfect person to replace me before that, I am happy to leave before that.

Best,

Sara Kaplow
Office Administrator