

UUCSC Board of Directors Meeting

April 9, 2026

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

Absent: Rev. Denis Paul

Call to Order: 10:05 am by Amber Collins

MOTION: Mary moves to ratify the March minutes.

PASSED unanimously.

New Business

Hiring Team to search for a new minister:

MOTION: Donna Caldwell moves to appoint Russell Stokes, Barbara Pagh, Sarah Dinklage, Danielle Bilecki, Kelsey Briggs and Nancy Richman to the Hiring Team with President Amber Collins serving as an ex officio member.

PASSED unanimously.

It was decided that the congregation cannot afford a fulltime minister. A $\frac{3}{4}$ time position is preferable but all possibilities will be checked on the UUA application in order to increase our access to available ministers. A negotiable financial package of \$95,000 will be submitted on the UUA application. The package will include health care. Since UUCSC contributes only \$5000 of the annual assessment of \$15,000 requested by the UUA, the hiring process will cost \$500.00.

Consistent messaging is needed to reduce the mysteries about the hiring process so weekly progress reports will be placed in the e-news and announcements will be made during the Sunday services. Congregational input will be sought and congregants are urged to use the Idea Box to provide suggestions, questions, and comments.

Treasurer and Staff Reports are appended.

MOTION: Chris Johnson moves to accept the reports.

PASSED unanimously.

Nominating reported that a potential candidate has stepped forward to be either a director or Vice President. Donna Caldwell will be nominated as the clerk. They are still soliciting nominees for their committee and the Board.

The Committee on Ministry will need 2 more members for next year as Barbara Nowicki and Sarah Dinklage cycle off. Danielle Bilecki and Aline Couture will serve one more year.

Old Business

The Personnel committee has begun the search for a new congregational administrator. Amber will contact Betsy Dalton for an update.

Farewell gatherings will be planned for both Rev. Denis Paul and Sara Kaplow.

Adjourned 2:20.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Fulton, Clerk

Reports

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County

Treasurer's Report

for the April 9, 2026 UUCSC Board of Directors meeting

Budget summary

I do not yet have the budget figures through March, but will forward the spreadsheet to you when I receive it.

At the last meeting of the Finance Committee, on March 20, we discussed the committee's plan to switch from QuickBooks software to Quickbooks online, a subscription service that makes spreadsheet information immediately available to authorized individuals. The consensus was that Ame Botus, our financial administrator, Sue Strakosch, Finance Committee chair, and I would be the three individuals with access. I do not know how soon the switch to the new system will take place, but as Ame would be the person most affected, it probably will depend on her schedule.

Budget for 2026-2027

Last month, Mary Alice and Ame prepared a draft budget for the Finance Committee. Sue and I have been working on it, while Rob Carter and Elise Bender have been working on proposed salary ranges in line with UUA guidelines. The committee was tentatively scheduled to meet sometime this week to prepare a first draft for discussion at the committee meeting on April 16.

Property and casualty insurance

On April 2, the UUA hosted an on-line seminar to announce the choice of GuideOne Insurance Companies of Des Moines, Iowa as the carrier that will offer a nationwide program for individual UU congregations.

The seminar speakers said that congregations with policies that renewed within the past few months do not have to wait until the end of the policy year to request a quote from GuideOne. On Monday, April 6, I sent an email to GuideOne requesting a quote for liability, property, workers' compensation, and umbrella coverage.

Fundraising

As of February 28, the income from fundraising is \$10,153. Fundraising expenses for the same period came to \$199.

Application for IRS determination letter

As you know, I have been working on the congregation's application for a "letter of determination" of 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. The only part of the application still uncompleted is the financial disclosures, which require detailed income and expense information for the past five years. I'm working on it.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Ellsworth

UUCSC Treasurer

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

April 4, 2026

Dear Members of the Board of Directors,

Since my last report, everything has changed. Joe has accepted a new position at the UU Congregation of Flint, MI, and I have sadly informed you all that I will not be renewing my contract for another year. I think it bears repeating that I was fully expecting that at this time I would be telling you that Joe had accepted an offer with one of the Massachusetts congregations that would have allowed us to move closer to Peace Dale.

"The Sisterhood of getting it done" has jumped into action, and I've heard through the grapevine that you've assembled a search committee. Meanwhile, I am tying up loose ends, planning for my departure, and even starting to look ahead at the move.

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

Worship Life

- 3/8 "Buying A Ticket," with Katt Lockwood
- 3/15 "The Gentle Art of Pruning," with Barbara Nowicki
- 3/29 "Unexpected Connections"
- 4/3 "Suffering in the Modern Day," sundown Tenebrae service with Lee Cowan, Ami Pienknagura and many other readers

The Tenebrae service this year was as dramatic and powerful as always, with three differences from the past: Lee did the welcome/introduction and the biggest, most climactic reading; Ami wrote and lead a responsive chant and provided opening music; and two readers actually wrote the stories of suffering they told. I did two Biblical readings. All in all it felt like a handing over of something I introduced to the congregation. My hope is for everything to be this way as I depart.

On Saturday 4/11 I'll be facilitating another Worship Assistant Grounding, in which we share ideas for making the worship experience more fulfilling for leaders, and

more welcoming for folks “in the pews.” We’ll be focusing on summer worship, potential changes to the liturgy, and ideas for Sundays in the fall in the unlikely event a new minister doesn’t immediately arrive.

Congregational Life

The Committee on Ministry has made itself available to help out in any way needed with the process of finding a new minister. While this feels like it may put a temporary pause on the work we’ve done in the Roots and Wings conversation, the good news is that the work, including the research and assessment groups that formed, could actually help in the process by helping to name the gifts, challenges and priorities of the congregation, providing helpful clarity.

It’s been impressive watching The Wunder Academy of Metamorphosis come together for summer ‘26. With two years of planning and execution under our collective belt, Lee is spending less time explaining the vision and ethos, and more time planning programming that is meaningful and responsive to the needs of the children. This feels like each year it becomes more of a model for how to begin this kind of project, rooted in the needs of those served and the resources available. I’m so proud to have been part of this process of creation, in this program that brings the whole congregation together.

Community Life

It’s been less than two weeks since my announcement, but in terms of the wider community, I feel like I already have one foot out the door. There was so much to do last weekend in preparation for this week (two Sundays, Tenebrae, Reflection Circle Meditation Group, and Sara off for Passover) that I couldn’t go to a No Kings rally or the RI Council of Churches monthly meeting.

Housekeeping

Monday is my regular sabbath.

My next furlough week is April 14-19. Joe and I will be in Michigan April 13-20 as he candidates and I look for a place to live.

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**

April 6th, 2026

Dear Board,

Spring is springing everywhere and the kids and adults in RE are having a lot of fun. We hosted coffee hour two Sundays ago and the kids helped arrange the snacks and set up. We had a lot of fun choreographing the dance for the Easter service and we've been singing a lot with Nick at circle time and with Ami during All Ages Choir. It feels very vibrant.

We would love for adults to visit us for any part of our Sunday time together. There is a clipboard in the Oneto room to sign up during coffee hour, or email me.

As you probably know, I love being part of services in the sanctuary. I helped lead the service on Easter and it was glorious to be together as a whole congregation. I also coordinated coffee hour and an egg hunt for a festive Easter celebration after service. I was part of the Tenebrae service to do the welcome and one of the readings. Looking ahead, we'll come up for the TFAA during the library service on April 19th and for the first Sunday of May. May 3rd will also be our traditional Beltane celebration with May Poles in the backyard after service.

Rev. Denis and I attended a meeting with leaders from four UU congregations in RI as well as the UUA representative for our region. We met at Westminster Unitarian in East Greenwich. It was a great chance to listen to each other and talk about what kind of support we need from the UUA and how our networking can support our congregations.

We've had our second meeting for the Wunder Academy and our next will be at noon on April 26th. I'm finishing the registration form this week and sending it to families. The DRE from Westminster said she's been talking it up to her families and we might have some of them joining us this summer!

I attended the No Kings rally in Westerly on March 28th and sang with the Singing Resistance group led by Meera Raphael. I love the power of collective singing.

We will be having a parent's circle on April 14th while Ezra leads elementary aged DnD. I'm really excited to have this circle as a space for sharing what's on our minds and in our hearts as parents in this time. I'm thinking of it as a

reflection circle for parents and hope to make it more formal and consistent next year.

Coming of Age is moving along. We have two more meetings in which we'll start to talk about what we believe and craft our credos. The kids will present at the service on May 31st.

Lots of love,
Lee

Office Administrator Board Report, April 7, 2026

Fundraisers

I provided support to the organizers of the Zydeco Dance event last month.

Stewardship and Finance

I worked with Trish Kelley on the distribution of the stewardship letters, and with Trish and Jeff Berry on processing returned pledges.

Tree of Life

I processed the information for 2 leaves that have been waiting a while for wording. The leaves have been sent out to be inscribed.

Retirement

I met with members of the personnel committee to discuss how the job has changed in the years that I have been here.

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 Jonnycake Center.

Best,

Sara Kaplow
Office Administrator