



First Unitarian Church of Oakland

Spiritually Alive, Radically Inclusive, Justice Centered



2025 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2025

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

First Unitarian Church of Oakland
685 14th Street, Oakland, CA 94612

[WWW. UUOAKLAND.ORG](http://WWW.UUOAKLAND.ORG)



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Our Covenant

We, the people of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, covenant to build a religious community sustained by relationships of understanding, mutual trust and respect.

Guided by our mission and collective inspiration, we will encourage all our members to participate fully in congregational life and to grow and learn together in faith and love.

Knowing that what one of us does affects the community, we covenant to act with loving kindness in all our endeavors by speaking directly and positively with one another.

We recognize that this calls for honesty in communications, valuing of diversity and inclusive process. We covenant to engage in ethical communications, to take our concerns to those responsible and to refrain from gossip.

Recognizing that conflicts have the power to strengthen or diminish our relationships, when they arise we will handle our disagreements with courtesy, fairness and forgiveness.

We promise to listen to one another, assume good intentions and identify common goals. In support of our shared ministry, we covenant to honor our commitments, keep our decision making processes transparent and give generously of our spiritual goals and material resources. This we covenant together.



Our Mission

We, the members of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, unite to build a beloved community within and beyond our walls. Guided by individual conscience and wisdom from many sources, we gather in worship and service to nourish the spirit, work for justice and celebrate the divine in all.

Our Ends

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland embodies beloved community as an intentionally multigenerational, multiracial, multicultural, anti-oppressive Unitarian Universalist religious community. We work for spiritual and social transformation within, among and beyond ourselves in support of our vision, mission and ends.

TRANSFORMATION WITHIN

Church members and friends discover and articulate personal spiritual growth. We lead lives of integrity and meaning that reflect our spiritual identity and values.

TRANSFORMATION AMONG

People of all ages who are part of our church community experience caring relationships which connect us to an ever wider circle of life. We use our collective gifts and learning to nurture and expand beloved community. We overcome barriers that divide the human family.

TRANSFORMATION BEYOND

Our neighborhood, the city of Oakland and the world community are more just and compassionate because of our prophetic role and ministries. We generously share our human and financial resources beyond the walls of our church.



Land Acknowledgement

**We acknowledge the land and the Peoples who belong to this Land,
the Muwekma Ohlone Peoples.**

Our church, institutions, and homes are occupying their lands, ancestral and current.

We acknowledge that the lands were stolen from the Ohlone Peoples, who have an ancestral relationship with this land, the plants, the animals, and the water—for millennia, continuous to the present day.

Ohlone People are still here. We also recognize that the Ohlone ancestors, in spirit and of the Land, are present.

In solidarity with all Indigenous People and their right to self-determination and justice, we commit to working toward accountability of the theft, dispossession, and resulting trauma Native Peoples continue to face.

We commit to being active partners toward the healing of the intergenerational trauma which persists to this day.

Amen. So may we live.





Annual Meeting Rules of Order

Adopted by the Board of Trustees; Revised on March 12, 2011

1. The quorum for all business meetings of the Membership shall be twenty-five (25) percent of Members eligible to vote as of the most recent record date.
2. In accordance with the bylaws, only members of the congregation may vote. A simple majority of members present will be sufficient to act on behalf of the entire membership.
3. Except where noted, voting shall be by raising hands. Votes are “up or down,” with allowance for minor, “friendly” amendments at the discretion of the Moderator. If there is a need for discussion which cannot be completed within the time allocated on the agenda, the matter will be referred back to the Board of Trustees with the charge of arranging for an opportunity for congregational discussion and vote, if needed, within the next 60 days.
4. Nominations and other voted-upon issues, whether private ballot, show of hands or other means, must be passed by a majority (>50%) of eligible voters present at the meeting, unless a higher threshold has been called for. Only votes FOR are factored into deciding a majority vote. Votes against and abstention votes lead to the same result: a negative vote. For instance if there are 110 voters, a majority is characterized when there are 56 votes in favor. But this is not the case if there are 54 votes in favor, 20 against and 36 abstentions, even though there are far more “yes” votes than “no” votes. Not marking the ballot or not raising your hand will be counted as an abstention and may affect the decision/outcome of a vote.
5. Discussion must be limited, in order to complete the agenda in the time allotted:
 - a. Any person may speak only once to an issue;
 - b. Comments must be brief and to the point;
 - c. The Moderator may limit comment; and
 - d. Any modification of the rules is at the discretion of the Moderator.
6. All speakers at the annual meeting must make use of the microphones to speak [when meeting in person].
7. Before speaking, speakers must be recognized by the Moderator.
8. Robert’s Rules of Order apply, except that the above rules will prevail in the event of conflict.



Agenda

10:30 am	Devotion - Rev. Laurel
10:50	Singing Together, Led by Rev. Laurel
11:00	Welcome and Call to Order - Nicole Fitzhugh, President of the Board of Trustees <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recognition of Meeting Secretary (Ingrid Mittermaier) and Parliamentarian (Mark Savage) – Nicole Fitzhugh● Reading of Congregational Covenant - Members of Social Justice Team● Announcement of Quorum Count - Dave Ruede
11:10	Congregational Business - Moderator Laurel Egenberger <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Motion to elect Laurel Egenberger as Moderator● Review Agenda and Rules of Order - Laurel Egenberger● Explanation of Ballot and Voting - Dave Ruede● Election of Trustees<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Presentation of candidates from the Nominating Committee○ Opportunity for nominations from the floor● Election of Nominating Committee Members (2024 - 2025)
11:40	State of The Church - Nicole Fitzhugh
11:50	Financial Report - Debby Kaplan, BoT Treasurer
12:05	Stewardship & Ministry Support - Nicole Fitzhugh
12:15	Benediction and Closing Words - Rev. Laurel
12:20	Adjourn Annual Meeting and Invitation to Social Time - Laurel Egenberger
12:25 - 1:00	Zoom link will remain live for social time



2025 Board Candidates

Presented by the Nominating Committee

Note from the Nominating Committee: “Below is information from each candidate about themselves. We asked candidates to submit a bio or fill out a form that asked questions about their involvement in our congregation and others, their skills, and their experience countering racism and other forms of oppression.”

Candidate: Michael Schafer

FUCO/UU Experience

- I have been a member since 1989.
- I have experience as a board member, RE teacher, worship associate, committee member
- Attended Community Unitarian in New York briefly.

Work/Life Experience

I was a public school teacher (middle school) for many years. I have also served on various community / non profit boards. I don't know that I have any particularly unique skills but am responsible and strong with follow through.

Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Training and Activism

Many trainings and worships daily through work as a public school teacher in Oakland/Alameda keep me aware and questioning.

I look forward to this opportunity to serve this congregation.

Candidate: Kate Lenhardt

FUCO/UU Experience

I first began attending FUCO in the Winter of 2001 and I believe that I joined within the year. I left FUCO and began attending Mt. Diablo UU Church during the Covid pandemic in the Summer of 2020. I joined MDUUC that year, with the hope that I would return to FUCO in the future. I returned to FUCO in the summer of 2024. I rejoined FUCO in the Fall of 2024.

At FUCO, I co-taught a drop-in RE class for several months focusing on UU values and social justice, I taught 7-9 Grade OWL, I frequently served as an usher and greeter for many years, I served one year on the Board of Trustees to complete someone's term, I served as a



Worship Associate for 2-3 years (my service terminated when I left FUCO), I served on COSM for less than a year (my service terminated when I left FUCO), I served on the Women's Retreat Committee one year. I have attended numerous Women's Retreats. I joined FUCO's pilgrimage to our partner church in Transylvania, lead by Rev. Huff, in 2011. I took an online Beloved Conversations class offered by Meadville Lombard Theological School. I'm sure that I've taken other classes along the way that I cannot recall.

During my four years at MDUUC, I was the chairperson of the Climate Justice Ministry Team, I was a frequent greeter and usher, and I taught 3 OWL classes (4-6 grades, 7-9 grades and 10-12 grades).

After returning to FUCO, I joined the Finance Team, the Worship Associates Team, and the OWL Team. If I am elected to the Board, I will leave all but the OWL Team to free up most of my time for the Board.

Work/Life Experience

I am retired. My career was as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, then as a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. I wrote my master's thesis on Conflict Resolution through Interpersonal Communication, using research and experience in the field of communication to create a conflict resolution protocol that therapists can use with their clients. My doctoral dissertation focused on how psychologists understand and utilize uncomfortable emotions that arise within them during the course of psychotherapy. As a MFT, I worked at a center for adults with developmental disabilities, at community mental health clinics, and in private practice. As a psychologist, I worked at the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Union City, which had the most diverse patient population of all of the KPMCs in Northern

California. There, I did psychological evaluation, individual and group psychotherapy, and coordinated the Emotional Well-Being courses in the Health Education Department. I was also the founding Director of the Postdoctoral Residency Training Program.

I am a clinic escort at the Planned Parenthood Clinic in Walnut Creek to provide safety and support in the presence of protestors. I am also a tutor at Alameda Reads, tutoring adults who want to improve their English language skills and/or study for the US citizenship exam.

Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Training and Activism

My career in the field of mental health has given me the opportunity to serve members of marginalized groups, from the perspective of mental health often being stigmatized and from the perspective of often working with persons who are marginalized due to their race, SES, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation.

I took an online Beloved Conversations class offered by Meadville Lombard Theological School. I have taken many courses/trainings regarding marginalization and oppression while in graduate school, maintaining my licenses, and through my employment.



Candidate: Chris Palm

FUCO/UU Experience

- I became a member of FUCO sometime in 1984 or 85 and served on the following committees:
 - ❖ Board of Trustees
 - ❖ Committee on Ministry
 - ❖ Finance Committee
 - ❖ Intern Committee
 - ❖ Canvass [aka Stewardship] Chair
- I organized several fundraisers such as a Casino Night and several yearly Auctions. Also organized the Celebration of Rob and Janne's Ministries in their last months here.
- Participated in many worship services having been a member of the choir under three different directors.
- I've taught Sunday school and talked with teenagers in Coming of Age about my experiences coming out as a gay man.
- Attended most Summer Congregation Retreats. I loved them all, even the rainy ones.
- The Talent Shows were not to be missed! Went on a trip with other members of this congregation to our sister church in Okland, Romania in the Summer, 1998.

Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Training and Activism

The two church classes that had the most impact on me were:

1. My Spiritual Autobiography
2. Jubilee an anti-racism class.

There were several years when I could not attend regularly. I am proud to say I paid my yearly pledge through all that time. I want this church to be here for other people just as it has been for me.



Board of Trustees Report

Submitted by Nicole Fitzhugh, President of the Board of Trustees

Members of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, welcome to the 2025 Annual Meeting.

It's been nine months since our last Annual Meeting, and in reviewing the Board's activities, I think the word I want to go with is "Foundational."

The momentum we felt at the last meeting, having finished up our engagement with Hope For Us, got us to pick up our tools and start doing some patching and shoring up of our congregation's basic operations. We gained new board members. Over the course of the year we onboarded our new Church administrator Jorim Rhee, who has been a wondrous part of our church staff. We contracted with Rev. Laurel for another year and started to put many of her ideas and visions into action. The Board approved Rev. Laurel's suggested plate-sharing plan and donated money to our chosen community partners. We joined Genesis to help put our ideals into practice in our community. With them we have begun our Listening Project, to deepen our connections with each other.

We chartered a new Operations Team to help steer the church's daily work in the absence of an executive minister. While we've had similar teams in the past, the needs and structures are different and continue to evolve. We also chartered a new Building and Grounds Committee to work on the safety, security, and maintenance of the building beyond what our staff can manage. We also chartered a Religious Education Committee to assist our Director of Religious Education, Jef Melcher, in guiding and raising our children into the values we share, with love and fun.

The Treasurer will speak about the budget and the financial state of the church, though I'd like to highlight that we have provided staff with a Cost of Living Adjustment this year. We also ran our stewardship campaign as a Board.

So, we laid down some foundation pieces, and now we need to start building on them. There are some areas of necessary growth. The Board agreed on structures to carry out the goals of our Hope For Us Action Plan, and now we are finally launching them. The first is a task force to help us continue our stated goal of being a multicultural congregation engaging in anti-racism work. We said farewell to the Journey Toward Wholeness program and Transformation Team. But current events have demonstrated that there is still so much to be done for our communities, for our nation, for ourselves, to build the beloved community. What programs can educate us and help guide our work? As a board we agree that our congregation can't do this



kind of work alone and unfacilitated. The task force would research antiracism programs and recommend first steps in the work.

Another goal was to work on conflict resolution. The Committee on Shared Ministry has brought to the board the recommendation that training, whether it be a Right Relations team or some other form of mediation, be done by its own group. We are looking for people willing to research and recommend a path forward.

Lastly, we wanted to begin a process to define the concept of Shared Ministry. To refresh our memories on the reasons why this matters, some of the conflict around the departure of our previous minister had to do with lines of authority, control over governance, and process. While those issues sound dry, these disagreements led to real pain and fractured relationships. Defining Shared Ministry anew will help us avoid issues going forward and help us re-envision congregational life with space for all our hopes, dreams and visions. Please look for information on signing up for these short-term, 3 - 6 month committee memberships.

As always, volunteers are needed to help welcome newcomers, maintain hospitality, and engage with church communications.

As part of this building, patching, and shoring up, we have decided that a few changes to governance are necessary. Under advice from Rev. Laurel and in discussion with the Finance Team, we are shifting our Fiscal Year to align with the Program Year (and coincidentally with common practice). It will now run from July 1st to June 30th. We are also looking at making some changes to the bylaws. The proposed text of these changes can be found in this meeting packet. To effect these changes with full transparency, we will be calling a Special Congregational Meeting on June 1st. At that time, the congregation will vote on bylaw changes, get an update to the budget for the new program year, and discuss the future of our plans for ministry. This will be when we celebrate! We'll have a luncheon and offer gratitude and get ready for summer and then our new program year.



Carrying out the Hope For Us Plan - Task Forces

I. Shared Ministry

The Shared Ministry Task Force is charged with canvassing the congregation (members, attendees, friends) to report on definitions of the term “shared ministry.” The task force will design a way to gather opinions and understandings of the term both in aspiration and in practice, as it relates to governance and spiritual praxis.

- The report should strive to include as many members of the congregation as possible using as many methods of communication as practical.
- The task force should have a report by February of 2025, to be able to present at the Annual Meeting in March 2025.

II. Conflict Engagement

The Conflict Engagement Task Force is charged with developing a congregational method and structure for resolving conflicts between any and all stakeholders in the congregation.

- Methods of conflict engagement should be assessed for ease of use, ease of training facilitators, ongoing support, and any costs associated with a program’s implementation, and then ranked.
- If possible, the task force should present an implementation plan for each method.
- This should be reported to the board for the Annual Meeting in March of 2025.

III. Anti-racism/ Anti-oppression/Multiculturalism (ARAOMC) Work

The ARAOMC Task Force is charged with recommending ways that First Unitarian Church of Oakland can extend knowledge and practices to further our goal of being an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural congregation. Journey Toward Wholeness was a successful program that no longer works for the congregation: what can take its place?

- The task force should research and recommend structured, successful programs with curriculum, programming, or facilitation training.
- Programs should be assessed for effectiveness, access, audience, support, and cost.
- This research and evaluation should be understood to be a part of our work– not the only anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and pro-multicultural programming at FUCO– and evaluated as such.
- The task force should have a report by February of 2025, to be able to present at the Annual Meeting in March 2025.



Proposed Amendments to the Bylaws

Members of UU Oakland will vote on the following four proposed changes to the bylaws at the next congregational meeting on June 1, 2025



Scan to access the full Bylaws or visit

uuoakland.org/about-us/our-elected-leaders/bylawspolicies/

Shall Art. V, sec. 2 be amended to move the annual congregational meeting from March to April, May, or June?

Current text: The Annual Meeting of the Congregation for the election of Trustees and the transaction of other business shall be held in March of each year, with the exact date to be set by the Board of Trustees.

Proposed text: The Annual Meeting of the Congregation for the election of Trustees and the transaction of other business shall be held in April, May, or June of each year, with the exact date to be set by the Board of Trustees.

Rationale for proposed change: To adjust the timing of the annual meeting in accord with the resetting of the budget year*, and to give the Board some flexibility in setting the date.

**The budget year has been the calendar year, Jan - Dec. We are changing it to synchronize with our program year, which is July 1 - June 30.*

Shall Art. VI, sec. 1(a) be amended to change the minimum number of Trustees from nine to four? [Summary of proposed change: Changes the minimum number of Trustees from nine to four. The maximum number remains unchanged at twelve.]

Current text: The Board of Trustees shall comprise no fewer than nine and no more than twelve Members, with the exact number of authorized Trustees to be fixed from time to time by resolution of the Board of Trustees.

Proposed text: The Board of Trustees shall comprise no fewer than four and no more than twelve Members, with the exact number of authorized Trustees to be fixed from time to time by resolution of the Board of Trustees.

Rationale for proposed change: To align the minimum number of Trustees in the bylaws with reasonable expectations regarding the number of trustees willing and qualified to serve.



Shall Art. VI, sec. 1(e) be amended to permit a Trustee to serve two full consecutive terms, not counting partial terms? [*Summary of proposed change:* Permits a Trustee to run for a second consecutive full term (not counting partial terms*). A full term is still 3 years.]

**When a Trustee vacates their seat on the Board early for any reason, our bylaws allow a member to be elected to serve out the remainder of their term.*

Current text: Re-Election - No Member may be elected as a Trustee for consecutive terms of office.

Proposed text: Re-Election - Term Limits. No Trustee may serve for more than two consecutive full terms of office. (A partial term shall not be counted as a term for this limitation). A one-year absence from the Board after a person has served the maximum number of consecutive terms of office shall render such person again eligible for election to the Board.

Rationale for proposed change: In recent years we have had a small number of Trustees due to a shortage of candidates, yet some exceptional members are willing to serve for two terms. Not allowing a Trustee to serve two consecutive terms hurts the continuity of Board functioning and squanders expertise.

Shall Art. VI, sec. 1(i) be amended to clarify that a quorum is a majority of current Trustees? [*Summary of proposed change:* Adds the words “then in office” to the definition of a quorum of the Board.]

Current text: A quorum shall be a majority of Trustees.

Proposed text: A quorum shall be a majority of Trustees then in office.

Rationale for proposed change: Merely to clarify the language of the bylaw.



Nominating Committee Report

Submitted by Sherry Larsen-Beville and Carol Wood, with technical support by Kris Wedding Crowell

As per our By-laws the “Nominating Committee shall be elected for the purposes of conducting recruitment for the subsequent year’s candidates for the Board of Trustees”.

After making phone calls to a large number of congregants, we have identified three candidates for Board service willing to serve full, three-year terms starting in 2025. A few people we reached out to are likely to serve in the near future. Many members of the congregation are committed to other forms of engagement.

We recommend the next Nominating Committee have at least 3 people actively on the committee, and that the committee meet shortly after being elected to create a plan for the coming year. Being on the nominating committee is an opportunity to have conversations with congregants and plant seeds about church leadership. If you are someone who does not wish to serve on the Board, know that Nominating Committee members cannot be nominated to serve on the Board.

We continued to make use of tools set up by previous committees:

1. Dedicated space on the UUOakland google drive for the Nominating Committee.
Whoever is in the boardnomination@uuoakland.org group will have access to that drive space.
 - a. This space is a growing collection of nominating committee notes and resources
2. Notes include people who might serve in the future
3. A [Report](#) made by the previous nominating committee after surveying Board members.
4. The [Trustee Job Description](#)



Finance Report

Submitted by Jodie Mathies

Our **2024 team** was Bill Blakely, Hester Green, Jodie Mathies, Molly Hermes, Kate Lenhardt, and Debby Kaplan (Treasurer), with much support from our congregational administrator.

Our **mission** is to provide accurate financial information to the Treasurer, the Board and the congregation, assist the Stewardship, Membership (CCT), and Building & Grounds teams, prepare the annual Budget with the Operations Team, and watch for anything that can impact our church's financial situation.

We **meet** on the second Saturday of the month, 10:30 – 12:00 (mostly by zoom), and as needed. We welcome guests, comments, questions, and suggestions at Financeteam@uuoakland.org or in person when you see us!

Financial Information Availability is always a priority!

2024 Financial highlights

2024 Results – Once again, we did not have the projected Operations Deficit in the 2024 fiscal (calendar) year, due to departure of staff and lower than projected maintenance costs combined with slightly increased rental and stewardship income. We hope that the increased revenue is sustainable, and expect that the level of lower-than-budgeted expenses is not!

Stewardship revenue is beginning to increase! Our membership is beginning an upturn though we are still quite a bit below pre-pandemic numbers; *it will take time to rebuild membership and associated stewardship*, as well as rental revenue.

Endowment Fund(s) Donations – We received donations that the Board allocated 50/50 to our Operations and Social Justice Endowments, as well as some donations designated to Social Justice. Thank you! The draws we take from Endowments are crucial to our operations.



2025 Financial Notes

Fiscal Year: The Board has decided to budget using our Program Year (July – June) rather than a January-December calendar year, to be more in line with staff contracts and church year programs. The Finance Team will assist the Board in creating a 2025-2026 Program Year Budget.

Stewardship – the 2025 Stewardship campaign produced approximately the same level of pledges as 2024. We have the opportunity to revisit our Stewardship before the start of the next program year and anticipate an increase.

Budget – The Board approved a 2025 Budget / Staffing plan that projected a \$18,000 deficit for 2024. As always our budget planning is conservative; we will be able to incorporate results from spring 2025 into our 2025-2026 budget. Some financial processes continue to be performed by a volunteer (Bill); again we are grateful!

Endowment Funds continue to rebound from 2022 losses.

Information Session(s) – Your Finance Team will meet with our new Board to provide financial background, and will provide financial updates in our Board Update monthly meetings.

Processes – a goal is to continue to document & improve processes and procedures, including use of Breeze software, bookkeeping, and streamlining financially related administrative processes. We want to start a regular process of reviewing our Quickbooks entries to assist our new bookkeeper.



Meet Our Ministers

Rev. Laurel Liefert, Half-Time Contract Minister

Worship Associate Training

In both the 2023-2024 and the 2024-2025 program year, we held monthly Worship Associate meetings and I facilitated a monthly sermon-writing seminar based on the book The Shared Pulpit by Erika Hewitt.

Sunday Worship Services

March through June 9, 2024: The themes were Growing into Possibilities, Imagination, Beloved Community, and Celebration. Hope for Us coaches led one service in March and the Closing/Celebration on June 2nd, the same Sunday as the Annual meeting. I led 3 services in March (including Easter), 2 services in April (including an Exploring Membership Circle and Ingathering of New Members), 3 services in May (including the Flower Communion and a Child Dedication), and was part of the first two services in June (including the Hope For Us Closing and Annual Music service). Every Sunday service either had a Worship Associate (and sometimes Jeffrey Melcher for Time for All Ages) and some of the services were led by Worship Associates or Rev. Kevin Mann or Piper/Conner Swim.

Summer Services: There were 14 Sunday services from June 16th through September 8th, organized by Jodie Mathies and Leslie Schipa and led by Worship Associates.

September 15, 2024 through March 16, 2025: This church year we have subscribed to Soul Matters Sharing Circle that has monthly themes for Worship and Small Groups: Invitation, Deep Listening, Repair, Presence, Story, Inclusion, and Trust. I led 2 services in September (including the Water Communion) and worked on the service with Guest Minister Zae Illo from Youth Spirit Artworks, I led 3 services in October, 3 in November (including the Bread Communion), 4 services in December (including an Ingathering of New Members, a service with Pastor Jacqueline Duhart, and the 8pm Christmas Eve service). I led 4 services in January (including Tolling of the Bells, Bend the Arc of Justice with the Justice Council steering committee and Mary Lim from Genesis, and Wild & Precious Lives), 1 service in February and will lead 3 in March.

Memorial Services and Pastoral Gatherings

I led Memorial services for Betty Bobo Seiden, Maxine Hubbard-Cole, Phoebe Watts, Bev Smrha, and Cathy Cade. I held pastoral gatherings after the death of Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs in Feb 2024 and after the November 2024 election. Other memorial services at church were held for Daphne Parsons and Kiran Rana. A service for Dolores Rothhammer-Ruiz, wife of UU member Michael Rothhammer, was held at her Catholic parish.



Program Council, Justice Council, Other

To begin rebuilding the Program Council, I led a gathering after church that 35 people attended. I've also been working to rebuild the Justice Council with the Steering Committee. UU Oakland is now a member of Genesis who is helping with our Listening Campaign.

I have attended many (not all) of the monthly Pastoral Associates meetings and have provided pastoral care to members, including hospital visits. I attend the monthly Board and Committee on Shared Ministry meetings. I write a weekly Minister's Musings. I participate in social justice activities, such as the Ceasefire march and the Reaffirming Sanctuary vigil.

Professional Enrichment

I participate monthly in the UU women clergy gatherings, Bay Area UU clergy cluster meetings, and the Pacific Central District UUMA Chapter retreats. I also sing weekly with the Swingshift Singers and attend retreats and women's song circles and weekly Sing & Awaken zoom sessions led by Jennifer Berezan. I meet regularly with a Spiritual Director and have a daily spiritual practice that includes QiGong, meditation, and Poetry by Heart.

IN MEMORIAM- REST IN PEACE

A Celebration of Life for Maxine Cole-Hubbard, mother of UU Oakland member Sharon Dolan, was held on May 18, 2024.

A Celebration of Life for longtime UU Oakland member Daphne Parsons was led by Rev. Mary Foran on June 2, 2024.

A Celebration of Life for Betty Bobo Seiden was held on June 9, 2024.

Betty Bobo Seiden has been active in both the Berkeley and Oakland churches, starting to attend UU Oakland in the 1970s. Now at 90 years young, you might see her sitting toward the back on the left side of the sanctuary on a Sunday morning. Betty was an educator in the Oakland public schools, and a mover and shaker in Oakland. She was involved in the broader UU movement in Black Unitarians Bay Area, and nationally in the creation of the Black Caucus and the organization Black and White Action. She also served on the Unitarian Universalist Association's Funding Panel and eight years on the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, which credentials UU ministers. Betty has always knit the church closer to the wider denomination through her ties. Betty served terms as secretary and then president of our church's board of trustees, and for many, many years, she sang in the choir under several directors. For your tireless efforts as an educator, your insistence on equity and inclusivity, your joy in singing, and your weaving our connections with the broader denomination, Betty, we will always be grateful. (From a service by Rev. Sheri Prud'homme "Honoring Women in the Church's History")



A Celebration of Life for Kiran Rana, husband of UU Oakland member Jeanne Rana, was held on August 14, 2024.

Kiran was a beloved Sufi teacher, ever-present with an open heart, generous in his sharing of wisdom and knowledge, with deep love and care for Jeanne and for the planet and human world. Among other things, Kiran will be remembered for the Sunday services he offered featuring Qawwali, Sufi devotional singing that expresses divine love, longing, and spiritual transcendence.

A Celebration of Life for Phoebe Watts, mother of UU Oakland member Sarah Watts, was held on October 26, 2024.

A Celebration of Life for Bev Smrha was held on January 11, 2025

Bev Smrha joined the church in the early 1980s. She was associate to the president for communications and development at Starr King School for the Ministry and would later become co-district executive of the Pacific Central District of the Unitarian Universalist Association. She was a force in the revitalization of the church in the 1980s and 90s and continues to serve its ministry with vision and passion to this day. She has served in many leadership roles through the years. But one role in particular, changed the course of our church for decades to come and eventually spread out to impact Unitarian Universalism more widely. Bev was instrumental in creating a new more egalitarian vision of church, laying the groundwork for a radically collaborative shared ministry. Eventually this grew into the associates programs, starting with the worship associates and later the pastoral associates. In this understanding, the ministers are spiritual leaders, guides, and educators, responsible for helping a congregation become filled with active lay ministers. Lay ministers, Smrha has said, are people “who try to walk in the same kind of steps ... who are trying to live their religious lives in the same way [as the clergy], even though it is part-time volunteer.” For this contribution to the course of our church’s ministry, and for the many ways you have been a faithful leader, Bev, we will be forever grateful. ((From a service by Rev. Sheri Prud’homme “Honoring Women in the Church’s History”))

A Celebration of Life for Cathy Cade was held on February 8, 2025.

Cathy Cade and her sons Carl and Leojo were members of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland. Cathy was an activist and groundbreaking lesbian photographer. Cathy’s full photo archive is housed at the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. Christine Hult-Lewis, who is the curatorial assistant for the Bancroft Library said that Cathy is “all about the power of visibility. It’s not only lesbian rights. It’s labor rights, civil rights, feminism as women’s rights – all these different sections that coalesce and converge in the very person of Cathy.”



Our Community Ministers, Rev. Claire and Rev. Kevin

UU Oakland is blessed to have “Community Minister” affiliations with two beloved people in the community, Rev. Claire Eustace and Rev. Kevin Alan Mann.



Rev. Claire was ordained at the church on May 19, 2024, and provides crucial pastoral/ministerial support to the Pastoral Associates group and larger community.



Rev. Kevin was ordained at the church on October 1, 2023, and resources the church’s BIPOC community and anti-racism efforts. He also represents the congregation at various regional, national, and global Unitarian Universalist networks.

Please read Rev. Kevin’s full report at bit.ly/revkev2025.



Children & Family Ministries Report

Submitted by Jeffrey Melcher, M.Div, Director of Religious Education and Exploration

The Summer program was led by the RE Committee (aka Spark Team) providing coverage for ages 4-10 all in one room with hired staff and a few volunteers. We started the Fall program September 2024 to coincide with the school year start-up. Over the fiscal year we have grown from 10 to 22 families regularly involved in our Sunday programs. Another dozen are sporadic or are historic UU Oakland families that popped back in for the 4-6 OWL class last spring.

We are running 2-3 classrooms every Sunday and averaging at this time 8-10 children and youth per Sunday. Counting the adult learners we are averaging 10-15.

Our effort succeeded in rebuilding the capacity for families with younger children, ages 4-10, while also providing a quality relational experience for families with youth. Our volunteer pool has grown slightly, though we need 2-3 more regular volunteers, because the program is growing. We hired two teen staff to support our volunteer efforts. Our 1st Sundays monthly RE family pre-service potluck breakfasts and family-friendly services have been a hit, enjoyed by families and elders alike. We continue to have 4th Sunday potluck and Game Days. I encourage more congregants to join in the intergenerational game play. Easter, Halloween, and Secret Buddies are special events supported by the RE Spark Team.

The RE Spark Team is now a chartered committee - *the Religious Education Committee*.

Members: Ingrid Mittermaier, Kris Wedding Crowell, Katrinca Ford, Alexis Wielunski, and our newest member Ingrid Severson-Tondre. *Big kudos to these dedicated people.* Matt Goldsmith has retired from the committee. Many thanks to Matt for his years of service.

Staff

London Ried is our lead childcare employee covering the majority of Sundays. Esther Kimelman-Block is also an occasional staff member for the Kinder Room little ones. Two teen assistants, Ella Jensen-Kane and Suleimon Johnson, have been hired as classroom assistants for both the Kinder Room and the Spirit Games Room. They are both delightful and helpful.

Tracey Hickey has continued as our lead Youth Group Facilitator. Volunteers this year have been: Charles Keatts, Henri Ducharme, David Conrod, and Heather McLeod. We are grateful for their time and talents.

Our Director of Religious Education/Exploration, Jeffrey Melcher, M.Div., is celebrating his 3-year anniversary as DRE with UU Oakland at the beginning of March 2025.



Staff are available to provide childcare after service for meetings, special events, workshops, and Listening Circles. Ask the DRE for more information: FamilyMinistry@UUOakland.org

Nursery/Pre-K (Kinder Room)

A significant reorganizing of the room by Katrinca Ford has made it possible for her to rent the room several times a week, and also has the Sunday program successfully sharing the space. Thanks also to Buildings & Grounds for some long overdue repairs.

The incoming families with many children ages 4-7 have been joining our community and the room began to regularly be overfilled. We have “graduated” the children ages 5 and up to the 2nd floor Spirit Games Room. This allowed families with toddlers to feel like there is a clean, calm, joyful, welcoming place for their children. These young families are now attending more regularly and will become another growing contingent of the congregation.

Spirit Room

Jeffrey and various volunteers have been bringing activities, music, heartfelt conversations, gratitude circles, and free-play to encourage growth of individual character and community-building for children and families. This group of children ages 5-12 have a playful multi-age experience. Suleimon Johnson is a new teen assistant as of Feb 2025.

Our Whole Lives (OWL)

OWL is a program this congregation takes very seriously. Fallow during the pandemic, and resuscitated last year, we pulled together a teaching team for a grade 4-6 class, and had 9 children successfully complete the class with a family bowling party celebration.

A spring K-1 OWL class is coming together with leadership from volunteers Alexis Weilunski, Katrinca Ford, and Kate Lenhardt.

The next hurdle to growth and support for OWL classes is the need for teachers to be trained who are male and non-binary identified. If you have experience or are willing to be trained, please contact the DRE.

Youth Group

Youth Group has been fluctuating in attendance. Congregations throughout the Bay Area are struggling to get youth groups up and running post pandemic. UU Oakland, MDUUC, SF UU and a couple other congregations have been collaborating to have OWL, Coming of Age, and a Faithful Fools teen street retreat. UU Oakland will be hosting an upcoming youth retreat in April.

Young Adult Ministry

Our new Young Adult Ministry team has Tyler Compton and Caitlin Kearns as young adult co-facilitators and with Jeffrey Melcher and Heather McLeod as mentors. They have a project you will soon hear about. They are also organizing UU Oakland members in their 20's and 30's to build a vibrant young-adult group connected with other Bay Area congregations.



Congregational Administrator's Report

Submitted by Jorim Rhee

Dear UU Oakland community,

This is my first Annual Meeting Report as your Congregational Administrator. As I reflect on my upcoming one year anniversary on staff (yes, it hasn't been quite a year yet!), I find myself settling on the word 'Awe'.

I am serving as the only full-time employee and as the main contact for the general public, our rental program, our building, our congregation and its bustling ministries and dedicated volunteers, and our staff. My job description is about three pages, and does not capture all the administrative and operational tasks that go into all that it takes to support our building and the community. Our church, decision-making, and work processes are in transition - streamlining, course-correcting, closing out expired processes and trying to figure out new ones, and so on.

*I lay this out, honestly and openly, to say - I've been in AWE of what feels like a daunting staff position at times, I've been in AWE of this community who are still choosing to be in joyful, loving covenant with one another, I'm in AWE of this 150+ year old mortar-and-brick building that continues to spread messages of love and justice, and I'm in AWE of the work that lies ahead. This short report won't be able to capture all the celebrations from my almost-year with you, but here are just a few highlights. These are probably about just 10% of my role. **Join me at the monthly Board of Trustees Public Meeting (on Zoom!) to get insight into my tasking and responsibilities at the church.***

Highlights from 2024

- *Supporting our 12-person staff, directly supervising 2 employees, holding HR and payroll administration*
- *Our Rental Program (which generates significant income for the church's operations) is seeing increased, consistent rental requests from both the congregation and outside groups*
 - *Outside groups are not only seeking us out for our location (accessible by various public transportation methods, and in downtown Oakland), but many times **because of the church's justice (lgbtq+ inclusion, ceasefire, etc) and open belief values.***
 - *Income generated from our rentals has significantly contributed to our operating budget (under Stefan's leadership, some years even saw \$60K+ in revenue) -> this dropped over the last 5+ years due to shelter-in-place, the general preference of*



online events over in-person, and transitioning church office presence. **The rental program is coming back!** To sustain its growth and even its current state, the Administrator and sexton Frank are working overtime.

- Onboarding of two new staff members into the Religious Education program (supervised by Jef Melcher, our Director of RE)
- Re-establishment of an Operations Team (current members include Janet McFarland as a Board Member, Jodie Mathies as a Finance Team Representative, and Jorim Rhee as the Congregational Administrator)
- Transitioning more church administrative and operations responsibilities from Office Volunteer Bill Blakely, allowing him to continue on a minimum and more sustainable capacity

With love,
Jorim, Congregational Administrator (they/she)



Ministry Reports (in alphabetical order)

Accompaniment Team

Submitted by Frances Kendall

This year, the Accompaniment Team provided support to a Guatemalan woman helping her navigate various systems to address health concerns, employment and immigration. We also provided some monthly financial assistance. At Tech Exchange we were able to acquire a replacement computer and to help her sign up for one of their computer literacy courses.

During the year, we enjoyed several dinners together. She gave back to us one wonderful day where she taught us how to make tamales, Guatemalan style, as well as delicious pupusas. Later she brought tamales to share with the Congregation. Since the election we have been in contact with her to help with any anxiety she may be feeling with the current political situation.

In the coming year we anticipate continuing to provide a similar level of support. In addition we will be monitoring for any changes the current Administration may make to the Humanitarian Parole Status.

With the implementation of the Immigration Justice Team, we intend to fold the Accompaniment Team under this new team.

Building and Grounds Committee

Submitted by Bill Blakely and Carol Layne

The major accomplishment of the Building and Grounds Committee is the actual creation of the BaG. After the retirement of Stefan in 2023, all administration of rentals moved to the Administrator, leaving the care and maintenance of the building in limbo. The BaG was created to fill this void. The BaG is an all volunteer group working closely with the Administrator and Frank, the sexton. Also, we are assisted by a cleaning service that does a deep-clean of the restrooms and the kitchen, and a handy-person, Kim Do.



Building Security

After a series of break-ins, the team addressed several security issues -

- locked the room in the bell tower
- added door security to the Vestry door to Castro St.
- reinforced the door bar to the 14th St. door
- installed a dead bolt to the Wendte Hall door to the rear patio
- repaired the door from Wendte Hall to the front lobby
- replaced the lock to the Starr King Room
- secured the opened stained glass window in the Sanctuary
- repaired and replaced the front door electronic entry system

Clean-up and Repairs

Quarterly clean-up days were well attended. Efforts were directed to dusting, vacuuming and brass polishing in the Sanctuary, Wendte Hall, the kitchen, and the Starr King Room.

Chair repair days, led by Corless Smith, were attended by a dozen folks who repaired the damaged seat backs of our 120 year old theater chairs in the Sanctuary.

Gary and Jane Facente continued their dedicated care of the outside grounds. Steve Thomasberger led monthly neighborhood clean-ups in conjunction with our next door neighbor AAMLO.

Handy-Person Kim Do led the efforts to upgrade security, repair cabinets, repair the big table in the Barlow Room, and other items.

Moving Forward

Many items of deferred maintenance have been identified. Plans are being developed to address these many issues that are outside of the scope of the yearly budget.

To comment, question, or join, email <buildingandgrounds@uuoakland.org>

De-cluttering

Here is the complete report, created by Carol Layne, of the De-cluttering effort.

Early in 2024 Bill Blakely called together a new Building and Grounds committee. Several people joined, including David Conrod, a new member of the church and a professional Fire Marshall. He suggested we do an informal fire inspection. He pointed out hazards in several



areas, in particular the large amount of boxes of paper in the basement which could create a fire issue that our sprinkler system may not be able to handle. He also highlighted clutter blocking two emergency pathways. Thus the Declutter Project was born. Tom Smith, Bill Blakely, and

Dave Ruede quickly pulled together a new Building and Grounds Charter and Bill worked with Meri Lane on an updated Records Retention Policy. Both were presented to the Board and approved. The Charter authorized us to work on the following projects under the guidance of stakeholders in the various areas and BaG supported us with labor and money.

200 plus Boxes

We began working to reduce the paper load in the basement. During weekly work days over a period of five months, we sorted through the boxes of paper, archived important documents, shredded unneeded papers with sensitive information, and recycled the rest. We went through approximately 140 boxes with about 60 remaining to be sorted. Special thanks to these who volunteered time to do this work: Ben Thompson, Hester Green, Jodie Mathias, Molly Hermes, Carol Wood, Tom Haw, Laurel Egenberger, Janet McFarland, Michael Delgado, Beth Skinner, Laila Ibrahim, Debbie Kaplan, Dave Ruede, Carol Layne, Frances Kendall, David Conrod, Bill Blakely and Tom Smith. Whether they came a single work day or multiple workdays we are grateful.



The Vestry

Our Vestry, small room off the chancel, serves multiple purposes. It is not only a place for our speakers to change into vestments or costumes, it is also used to store our decorations for the chancel. More importantly it is an emergency exit to leave the building and a path must be kept clear between the doors. Jane Facente, Jodie Mathias, and Carol worked to tidy the room to keep this exit clear. Dave and Bill marked the floor area that needs to be kept clear for those exiting in an emergency.



Broken Banquet Tables in the Table Room



Building and Grounds (especially Bill Blakely and the Two Daves - Ruede and Conrod) got a chance to use the power tools Stefan donated to the church. We pulled out five broken Banquet Tables from the crowded Table Room and cut them up with the circular saw so they would fit into the dumpster. Metal legs and hardware were set aside for our Large Trash Pickup and Recycling. Note: The table room is also an emergency path for firemen, in this case, to access the fire panel in the basement.

Organ Blower Removal and Large Trash Pickup and Recycling



Dave Ruede contacted several local and national companies to determine the best decision about the future of our organ blower. It had been abandoned in the basement a couple of decades ago after the difficult decision to let go of the church's pipe organ. Companies contacted said it has little or no value and would cost more than it was worth to ship it somewhere. A local SF organ company that knew our organ said they have two blowers in their warehouse and could not find customers. The organ blower was walled into a room that would have had to be demolished to remove it in one piece. Carol Layne researched and found an awesome company, American Hauling, that was able to dismantle and remove the organ blower and recycle the metal. The room previously housing the organ blower can now be repurposed for storage. Jorim and Carol worked together to coordinate with the same company for a large trash pickup and recycling of other items including unneeded electronic equipment, etc.



Going...



Going...



Going...



Gone!



Holiday Decoration Tubs



Ingrid Mittermaier, Orhan Mittermaier, Jane Facente, Carol and Dave went through the 18 plus tubs containing holiday decorations, doing an inventory on what was good and removing unused or damaged items. Our decorating team was amazed and commented (at least according to Dave), “Wow, this was so easy! I could never imagine decorating for the holidays could be so much fun. Can’t wait to do this again next year!”

A Mountain of Dishes



Carol Wood, Jodie Mathies, Kate Leonhardt, Frances Kendall, Frank Tabor, and Carol Layne helped remove the mountain of abandoned potluck dishes and utensils stored in the basement. Those that were not needed for our kitchen were put on display during coffee hour for congregants to take home as a new treasure or reclaimed old belonging. We also cleaned out the food service item cabinets and reorganized the kitchen to accommodate the dishes and utensils we decided to keep.

With illnesses, travels, and the holidays we took a break at the end of the year. We have yet to restart in the new year but plan when we can renew our energy to work to complete the project.

In conclusion, it has taken a team of volunteers to do all this work, which is sometimes considered grunt work, but some feel it has contributed to lifting the church's morale as we continue coming out of the crisis mode brought on by the pandemic and other crisis issues.



Community Connections Team

Submitted by Maria Bielass

Members: Maria Bielass, Emily Stoper (10-minute conversations), Clark Sanford (Breeze updates)

Our main activities are welcoming people to our church, having conversations with them, and connecting them to programs and activities in which they would like to get involved. We also facilitate their process of exploring membership. We've had at least 87 newcomers over the last year.

We've had 12 new and returning members since last March and 2 ingathering services to covenant with them. Our next ingathering will be on May 18th.

Thank you to everyone who has engaged with all these newcomers, answered their questions, and welcomed them into your groups!

Highlights:

- We updated our online newcomer card which is linked to our Breeze church database. We're experimenting with different methods for making these cards accessible and streamlining the process (QR codes, for example). Jorim Rhee made Welcome/Generosity cards to put in the seat backs which have QR codes for the online newcomer card on one side and for donating on the other side. We also have them available on the greeting and welcome tables. They're also being used with new families.
- Exploring Membership session with Rev. Laurel and I (opportunity for newcomers to get to know each other, share their journeys, and learn more about our church community and Unitarian Universalism).
- Available during family breakfasts to answer questions about membership or provide opportunities for people to become members (sponsored by the RE program).
- Organized the signup of people who serve as greeters and ushers {using SignUp Genius} on Sunday mornings and the Christmas Eve services. Updated the usher log with Sherry Larsen-Beville and Carol Wood to reflect recent changes. Transitioned into using the main door of the church before and after the service again
- Updated the Words of Welcome used during the Sunday services
- Worked with Jorim Rhee to have new members announced during the Sunday services and in the Chalice Chatter
- Created a "Community Connections" section for the Chalice Chatter which includes links to the online newcomer card, how to request a name tag, provide contact



information changes, sign up to be a greeter or an usher as well as information about the welcome table and 10-minute conversations after the service

- Emily Stoper has been offering 10-minute conversations almost every Sunday after the service. This has been valuable for newcomers to learn more about our church and ways to participate. She emails them with ways to get involved and provides information about covenant groups.
- Created name tags for members, newcomers, children, and staff
- Maintained our “people” data in Breeze - adding and updating information about the people in our community and improving the database to reflect our processes (thank you Clark!)
- Maintained our records in the UUA database (UU World magazine)
- Maintained our mailing list in MailChimp (Chalice Chatter)
- We are continuing to use the infochange@uuoakland.org email as a way for people to let us know about changes to their contact information or other life changes.

Committee on Shared Ministry

Committee Members: Laila Ibrahim, Suzanne Van Houten, and Amy Carlson

The Committee on Shared Ministry and Rev. Laurel meet monthly with the purpose of attending to the health of the church’s ministries and their effectiveness in fulfilling our mission. This year we had three main focuses: conflict resolution, ministerial education and development, and church assessment.

All three members of the committee took the UU Institute’s course Tending Covenant: Training for Right Relationship Teams. The training focused on helping congregants live into the practice of their church’s covenant and to see conflict as a normal part of being in community and as faith formation. Our covenant encourages us to “engage in direct conversation when we have conflicts or concerns.” To address this part of our covenant, the Committee on Shared Ministry is putting together a resource for direct communication and hopes to hold some gatherings to practice this communal skill.

Under ministerial education and development, COSM is supporting Rev. Kevin Mann by being part of his preliminary fellowship committee as he works towards preliminary fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association. Rev. Kevin has held two meetings and will hold a meeting monthly until October. Suzanne and Laila will alternate attending the meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to give feedback and support to Rev. Kevin on his personal and



professional development in the areas of competence for Unitarian Universalist ministry. This year, COSM, also wrote a recommendation to the board for the congregational sponsorship of Jef Melcher as a ministerial candidate. The board unanimously approved it with “high confidence with his potential and sustainability for UU ministry.”

Last year COSM created and administered an evaluation survey for congregants to give feedback on the well-being of the church and its ministries based on the mission, vision, and end statements of First Unitarian. 48 members took the survey and a handful attended in person feedback sessions. During a worship service in April, Laila and Suzanne gave reflections on what they learned from the survey. COSM decided to do the survey again this year in order to give congregants an avenue to give feedback on the church’s ministries. As of now, only 15 people have taken the survey and our in-person feedback session on February 23 was unattended.

Covenant and Affinity Groups

Submitted by Emily Stoper

Forty-three members and friends of our congregation attended one of five covenant groups during the past year, up from 34 members in 4 groups last year. In these groups, people deepen relationships with each other and discuss the monthly themes as well as other personal, social and spiritual topics.

One group meets on the 2nd and 4th Monday mornings of every month. Three other groups meet one evening a month: on 3rd Tuesdays, 1st Thursdays, and 3rd Thursdays. The new group meets in person on 2nd Friday afternoons at 1:30. All these groups are open to anyone who wishes to join. The covenant groups led a Sunday service in November 2024 that included an original skit showing what a covenant group is like. For detailed information about all the groups, contact covenantgroups@uuoakland.org.



Endowment Team

Submitted by Tom Haw and Laila Ibrahim

Our three congregational endowments will ensure and strengthen the vision, mission and presence of First Unitarian Church of Oakland for the future. In addition to our congregational accounts the UUA holds two trust accounts for us that we have no oversight or control over. Because of the general decline in the stock market our endowments decreased this year. As of December 31, 2024:

The Wendte Endowment for Building Maintenance and Improvement

- Went from \$1,601,204 to \$1,664,443
- The congregation took a distribution of \$74,450.83 for general building maintenance and repairs thereby fulfilling the requirements of the endowment.

The Aurelia Henry Reinhardt Endowment for Justice

- Went from \$220,816 to \$240,178
- The congregation is not getting distributions until we get this account to \$250,000. We are delighted to report that contributions to this endowment in early 2025 have brought it over \$250,000 so we will be taking distributions for the first time!

First Unitarian Oakland Memorial Endowment Fund

- Went from \$196,800 to \$204,625
- \$9099 was distributed to the congregation for general expenses.

Our endowments ensure this building will still be a thriving liberal religious congregation 150 years from now! We could use more members on our team.

Contact Laila (laila.d.ibrahim@gmail.com) or Tom (tomhaw04@gmail.com) to join us, with questions or to learn how to contribute to our funds now or in your estate planning.



Justice Team

Submitted by Steve Thomasberger

The church's Justice Team was formed in November 2024, when over 30 congregants met to discuss how the church could become more deeply involved in social justice activities. The church's Justice Team was formed during this meeting. The Team took its charge from the church's *Ends Statement* and defined our role as:

- To inform the congregation of events and programs that they can be involved in.
- Lend assistance to friends, allies and neighbors in the community
- Join with local progressive organizations and allies and promote their work
- Prepare the way for creating our own church-wide justice programs.

We began by investigating how we could forge partnerships and make allies in the Oakland community. This involved contacting numerous justice-centered groups in the area and asking how we could connect with them and support them. Given what we learned we began to inform congregants about these organizations and their activities. This was done through Chalice Chatter, the UU Listserv, and emails to interested congregants. These activities have included volunteering at free food distribution, assembling bikes for children of incarcerated parents, and marching against deportations and for sanctuary, and many more.

In January we created and delivered a service on *Bending the Arc of Justice.*, reaffirming our commitment to the work for justice and social transformation. We also highlighted the Church's rich recent history in the struggle for social change. This included naming over 15 different justice-related activities that members of the church had been involved in, and thanking all those for their service. This truly revealed that "you don't have to do it alone", and we "have not done it alone".

The Justice Team has taken on the task of leading a "listening campaign" to hold one-on-one, formal, intentional, face to face conversations. The objectives are:

- Connect through intentional conversations
- Know each other better
- Allow newer congregants and youth to be listened to and be drawn closer to the center of the Church.
- Reconnect with those that left the church to learn more about them.
- Build relationships and discover the passions of our congregants
- Inform Church leaders on the issues congregants care about
- Build our effort to be a Justice-loving Church.

These conversations will be completed on Sunday, May 18, with a culminating celebration after church.



Men's Fellowship/Lunch Group

Submitted by Dave Ruede

The UU Oakland Men's Lunch Group meets on the fourth Saturday of each month starting at noon and ending approximately 90 minutes later. This past year has seen some important changes.

To accommodate men who cannot meet during the week due to work obligations we moved the meeting from the third Friday to the fourth Saturday each month. This has brought new faces and an increase in attendance, both greatly appreciated.

During the warmer months we moved our meeting place to The Gardens at Lake Merritt (where the Bonsai Garden is also located). We found a perfect spot, a picnic table near a water feature that is both beautiful and provides a pleasant background sound when the waterfall is operating. We meet at the entrance gate at noon, the one with benches and closest to Children's Fairyland, and walk to the table.



The Gardens at Lake Merritt Entrance



Panama Court, Oakland

During cooler months we have been meeting at Ron Weisberg's Panama Court Community Room.

On any given meeting date there are between five and ten men in attendance. While on occasion we have met at a restaurant, for most meetings lunch is a Bring-Your-Own affair. Some occasionally bring food or snacks to share. At the indoor venue there is a microwave to heat lunch for those who would like to do so.

All men are welcome. A reminder is sent to the group early in the week of the meeting. Contact Dave Ruede or Ron Weisberg for more information.



Monthly Community Potlucks

Submitted by Ron Weisberg

The Monthly Potluck has continued to be a gathering place for community and good food. During the summer of 2024 we even dared potluck themes, “Mexican” and “Italian.” Your team, Ron and Esther, are amazed every month at the quality, variety and quantity of dishes people contribute. We are grateful to the volunteers who step up every month to help clean up after the potlucks. We also continue to think of Joyce C. and look forward to her return to our potlucks. Monthly potlucks are an exciting place to meet new people and engage with old friends. Everyone is glad to see them continue.

Music Program

Submitted by Renée Witon and Susan Keiter, Co-Directors of Music

Music at UUOakland continues to be a source of inspiration and continuity for the congregation, spiritually ministering in ways words cannot. Considered the largest volunteer group at the church, the Music Program provides an important home for members and attendees who desire a place to make music in a community of like minded people. These individuals and musicians joyfully volunteer countless hours toward making worship meaningful and enjoyable. We are indeed a “musical family” of sorts, creating and working together in a way that is rewarding for all.

Susan Keiter and Renée Witon continue their vibrant partnership co-directing the music program. Each Co-Director is responsible for specific roles and responsibilities, and they support each other’s artistic and administrative efforts in serving the larger vision and mission of music at UUOakland.

The Co-Directors continue to enjoy collaborating with Rev. Laurel Liefert in planning and participating in worship. Rev. Laurel, a talented musician herself, loves to contribute musically to church services on a regular basis. The Co-Directors also work with visiting ministers and lay worship leaders to select and coordinate music tailored to worship themes.

In 2024-25, the Choir welcomed “musical activist” Melanie DeMore to give a singing workshop for the musicians at UUOakland. Evelie Delfino Sales Posch was also welcomed as a guest musician, and continues to provide music for 2-3 services each



year. Evelie and the Mahal EthnoFusion Music Myth & Magic Ensemble contribute to a varied palette of music at services. Piano accompanists Ariana Querubin and Ian Llacer-Chamberlain have left for graduate school. Vincent Raines continues to serve as accompanist 1-2 times each month.

This year, the Music Program was pleased to provide musical support for the 125th Anniversary Celebration of Swami Vivikenanda's visit to the Bay Area. In addition, the music program supported the memorial services of former members Betty Seiden, Bev Smrha, Cathy Cade, Phoebe Watts and Maxine Hubbard-Cole.

Crescendo Choir has nearly doubled in size! It continues to have a dedicated core group, and more new singers are joining. Dedicated members rehearse every Wednesday evening and sing twice monthly during services August through June. Choir membership mirrors the church membership. As church membership and enthusiasm increases, we are seeing the Choir and the other musical groups at the church increase in membership. We have rediscovered the handbells and are using them in services.

Utilizing monthly themes that celebrate different ethnic groups in the United States (Hispanic Heritage Month, Arab American Heritage Month, etc.) the Choir sang in **multiple languages** this year. In addition, the choir continues to increase their repertoire by learning **1-2 new songs each month**. The Choir also **welcomes back former choir members** who sing in the Easter service and in the upcoming annual all-music service in June.

Joyful Noise Band continue to inspire and offer their talents as pre-service music. The Band also played in the annual holiday concert and will perform at the annual all-music service. New musicians are joining the band and band members occasionally provide solo and ensemble music during Sunday services.

Pop-Up Choir performs in alternate months and continues to be a popular musical outlet for the church. Parents of young children now are participating in Pop-Up Choir. In coordination with the RE program, childcare is offered earlier for these parents. Pop-Up Choir continues to offer a low-commitment, fun opportunity to participate in church music.

The Music Co-Directors **produced the eclectic and popular Holiday Concert** in December. Occurring annually for decades, the Holiday concert fosters community during the holiday season and continues to contribute to the financial health of the church. Musicians in the congregation contributed to a joyful and celebratory evening of music that served to unite the congregation during the holiday season.



Music Co-Directors worked with summer worship leaders and oversaw the musical aspects of creating summer worship. The Co-Directors also provided music for several summer services.

Renée Witon continues the administrative responsibilities of creating and updating Orders of Service, and has taken on the responsibility of creating and updating the Upcoming Worship pages on the UUOakland.org website.

First Unitarian Oakland Chancel Choir's three albums (Bring Many Names, Music in the Air and Wake Now My Senses) continue to be available for streaming on all major platforms (Spotify, iTunes, YouTube, Pandora, etc.). **CD versions of these recordings continue to be sold online** through the UUA Bookstore and are selling out regularly, contributing to the church financially.

The Music Program looks forward to creating meaningful worship music to minister to the congregation – not only during Sunday services, but also in the weekly rehearsals where camaraderie and community are developed and established. We continue to strive to reflect the mission of the church in culturally and stylistically diverse musical offerings.

Neighborhood Beautification Team

Submitted by Steve Thomasberger

For the past 2 to 3 years volunteers from our church have been involved in neighborhood beautification together with volunteers from the Friends and Stewards of the African American Museum and Library of Oakland (FSAAMLO).

4 to 5 times per year we have come together to rake leaves, remove weeds, pick up trash, remove graffiti, and socialize. Often there have been about 10 volunteers involved. In January, we had 20 volunteers, and these included members of Food to Grow, a group that supports black farmers in urban and rural parts of California.

Our next beautification effort will take place on Saturday, April 19, from 10:30 to 1 PM. We have registered with the City of Oakland, Adopt A Spot program, and we will be listed as a host site for Earth Day 2025. We look forward to having our congregants turn out for this event and other cleanup efforts throughout the year.



Pastoral Associates

Submitted by Evelyn Sheridan

UU Oakland has had a committee for the support of the congregants of the church by providing comfort, practical assistance, and a sense of well-being since 1991. Due to the attrition of this group, once shortly after the current chair joined in 2019 and again in this post-isolation era, we are now five regular members who are Judith Hunt, Annette Williams, Rev. Claire Eustace (in a ministerial capacity), Sherry Larsen-Beville and Evelyn Sheridan as the chair. The Rev. Laurel Leifert was also able to attend our meetings frequently this past year and was quite helpful. The group is at 50-75% capacity. We meet monthly via Zoom.

This past year we have assisted with memorial services, post-surgical support, other hospitalization support, supportive home visits, in-person and telephone conversations, decluttering help, delivering the Helping Hands Quilt to members, rides for people needing transportation assistance, and bringing food to members and their families in times of need.

Our focus remains finding and actively recruiting more members to PA, rebuilding our Lend-a-Hand list, and procuring some training sessions. We are participating in a Worship Service this summer in hopes to make everyone familiar with the group. To be a member of Pastoral Associates we prefer that you have been a member of the church for at least one year. Our Lend-a-Hand list provides opportunities for new members to participate by cooking meals, visiting, writing notes, providing transportation or decluttering support.

A proposed project for next fall is the creation of another caring quilt with the guidance of Laila Ibrahim.

Personnel Committee

Submitted by Rinda Bartley

The Personnel Committee was dissolved in 2020, after the completion of a 4-year project in creating a Personnel Handbook for all employees. This Committee was reinstated in early 2024 with the hiring of the current full-time Administrator. The church greatly benefits from this Handbook which is still the main source of our HR policies; much gratitude to Danny Schottenfeld and Roxie Kellam, former Personnel Committee members who created it.



As the Personnel Committee has only one working member, the scope of work is narrow. The primary function currently is providing supervision to Jorim Rhee, our Congregational Administrator, who is coming up on one year of employment with UU Oakland. That process continues to be a joy. In addition, Rinda is assisting in appropriate tasks such as staff salary reviews, helping to insure that HR documentation is accurate and organized, and weighing in on various staff and personnel issues that arise, working in conjunction with the Operations Team and the Board. There is much more work that needs to be done, such as,

- insuring that all staff have appropriate annual or regular reviews/evaluations and supervision
- Making sure that "Safe Church" policies are upheld in relation to staffing
- Helping to envision and plan for future staffing needs as the church grows
- and more!

There is a need for additional Personnel Committee members, probably one or two. If this kind of work appeals to you, especially if you have past experience in the HR realm, please contact Rinda Bartley or the Board President.

Poetry Circle

Submitted by Ron Weisberg

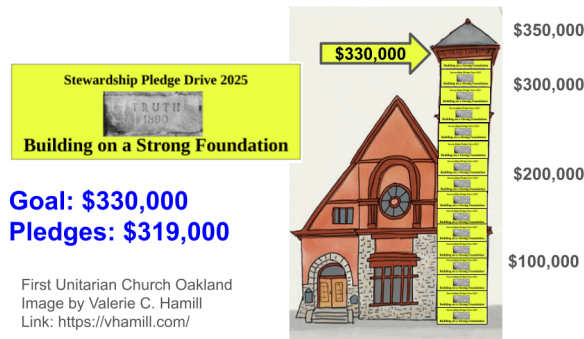
The First Sunday Poetry Circle has thrived this past year. We've added new members and focused more on topics related to church themes. Our new members include a current Worship Associate and a published poet, who has written about the wonder of squids. Our church related themes have been "Remembrance" (Bell Tolls) and "Love Your Enemies" (Martin Luther King Day). We've continued to circulate our monthly collection of poems to the general membership. During the summer we even held forth our favorite poems and delight in poetry by presenting an entire worship service on poetry. We do not tie poems to chairs and beat them.



Stewardship Team

Submitted by Dave Ruede

The 2024 Stewardship Campaign had its kick-off service on September 22, 2024 with the theme Building on a Strong Foundation. This phase of the campaign ended on November 3, 2024 with a celebration lunch organized and hosted by Jodie Mathies. Pledges of \$291,000 were received toward our goal of \$330,000. Since that date additional pledges have been received. A total of \$318,653 from 106 pledges have been received as of the writing of this report.



Virtual Pledge Drive Tracker used during Sunday Services

This year's Pledge Drive saw several challenges. There were no volunteers for the Stewardship Committee. The newly constituted Board of Trustees conducted the campaign which took up a significant amount of the Board's attention. Fortunately three Board members ran the 2023 Pledge Drive so were familiar with the process.

The campaign began earlier than in past years and there was less time to prepare for the kick-off. The most significant effect was that the church's website was not updated with the new information until one week after the kick-off. Several congregants who normally make their pledges online were not able to do so. Fortunately printed pledge forms were either handed to those who attended the first two weeks of the campaign, or mailed to those who were not in church during that time. Special thanks go to Michael Fitzhugh for his support to update the Stewardship website pages for the Pledge Drive.

After three weeks Board members and a team of volunteers were given names and contact information to call or email those who had not made their pledge and remind them to do so for the new year. Thanks to all Board members, Lucia Savage, Emily Stoper, Sherry Larsen-Beville and others for taking on this important activity. Special thanks to Bill "Breeze" Blakely for his support entering and tracking pledges in our database.



Starting the Pledge Drive earlier meant we ended it earlier than usual. This helped in two ways. First, the Celebration Lunch did not overlap with the annual Bread Communion Sunday or Potluck Sunday, making both special celebrations. Second, it meant there was more time for the second phase of the Pledge Drive, calls to those who still had not yet made pledges. As in past years, Jodie Mathies was a tremendous help in helping to reach those folks. As a result a pledge total of \$311,000 was able to be used to set the 2025 budget.

Some observations and lessons were made from this year's campaign. First, the total is lower than in past years. Stewardship was able to identify some of the reasons: congregants moving away, retiring and reducing their pledges, and in some cases those who passed away. Thankfully a good portion of those losses were offset by new members and friends who made pledges for the first time.

Compared to previous years we have 11 fewer pledges with a slightly higher total. Pledges come from individuals or a household, what we term "pledge units". While there were fewer pledges the total number of donors remains around 150, comparable to the past few years.

Some concluding thoughts

Stewardship is more than the Pledge Drive. The traditional role of Stewardship includes asking for "Time, Talent and Treasure". Time means Volunteering, not just one-time activities but ongoing committee work, for example. Talent describes needed skills such as experience with spreadsheet, databases, websites, using tools. Treasure means money, both Pledges and Planned Giving, including the church in your will for example.

"Time, Talent and Treasure" is a critical area in all churches, and ours is no different. Churches can only function with the work of volunteers willing to work on committees such as Building and Grounds, Personnel, Membership, Safety and Stewardship, to name a few. Our future is in our own hands. A question from a TV hospital series brings to mind the question each of us need to consider, "How can I help?"

Women's Retreat

Submitted by Karen Axelsson, 2024 Head of the Women's Retreat Planning Committee
(members- Karen Axelsson, Hester Green, Patsy Wood, Martha Silverspring, and Judi Purdom)

The mission of our committee is to put on an annual weekend women's retreat for women and non-binary members of our church community.



In 2024, the retreat was held on August 23-25 at Redwood Glen Conference Center in Loma Mar CA. Our theme was “Healing - From the Inside Out.” The retreat was advertised in both Oakland and the unitarian church in Marin. Most planners and attendees were from Oakland, but Marin contributed a small number of folks to both categories.

The retreat was filled to capacity, with 54 individuals signed up. The charge for attendance was \$265. We solicited both requests for scholarship and donation, in hopes of assuring that all would be able to attend the retreat regardless of financial position. From a financial perspective, the retreat broke even, with requests for scholarships equalling donations given. This has been the case for at least the last 5-6 years.

The retreat included multiple workshops offered by members of our community and a Sunday morning worship service led by Emily Stoper. There were opportunities for hiking, swimming, singing, writing, arts/crafts, meditation, yoga, and multiple community building exercises. A copy of the weekend program is also submitted.

In the evaluations solicited from all attendees at the end of the retreat, the retreat seemed to be a resounding success. Almost all attendees indicated that they would like to return next year, and included such comments as “best community-building event of all”, “highlight of my summer”, and “a breath of fresh air”.



End of Report Packet