

Albany Unitarian Universalist ANNUAL REPORT

Part II: Year in Review



2025-2026

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany

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A Welcoming Congregation

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YEAR IN REVIEW

Ministers Report 2025-2026

Following this second year of our shared interim ministry, I see a congregation that is more settled and more focused than a year ago. Your purpose is clearer, illuminated by the ways in which you are showing up, both within and beyond the congregation. Conflict is more often approached with compassion, and inspiring learning and growth, with less division. As the governance work takes shape and increases role clarity, I'm also seeing a greater willingness to allow those entrusted with authority, at every level, to make decisions and act. And your compassion for one another inspires me every day. In short, this congregation is a good place to be in a chaotic and scary world. I remain proud to be among you.

I. A Few Highlights

In no particular order:

Staff – this year we welcomed two new staff members: Nicholee Froese, Congregational Life Coordinator, in October, and Michael Washington, Tech Support Staff, in April. Nicholee has skillfully created a social media presence that is inviting, informative, and creatively shares who we are with the world. And she is bringing new leadership to Congregational Life as a whole. Michael replaced our previous Tech Support Staff Ben Warner, who resigned in December. Michael is new, as of this writing, but is already a calm and capable presence in our worship services. We are grateful for Nicholee and Michael.

The staff team as a whole continues to be remarkable – highly capable and supportive of each other and the mission, and a joy to work with.

Ministry to Children, Youth and Families – Programs for Children and Youth is growing, as is the number of younger adult members (who comprise most of the new members this year). Increasingly, parents and kids are part of whole-congregation events, such as Friday Night Lights, multigen services and No Kings rallies. We are fortunate to have a religious educator in Elizabeth Baldes who appreciates the changing struggles of parents and the needs of young people in this strange time and brings dedication and creativity to meeting those needs.

Music Ministry – This year we started to see the results of Director of Music Ministry Olga Martinez's intentional training and empowering of congregants. The choir has grown to the point of needing an additional riser. Talented pianists are expanding the scope of what is offered and allowing Olga more flexibility in leading the choir. And volunteer administrative support allows Olga to do more with the hours she has. None of this is an accident; it is the result of Olga's planning and relational approach to music ministry. And this year, the impact was noticeable to all.

Sunday Morning Safety - Under Jaye Holly's leadership, this group assessed our physical safety on Sunday mornings, created a safety manual, began training and equipping people with roles of

responsibility and created processes for responding to various emergencies. There is more to do, especially with education and training, but this is remarkable progress for one year.

Democracy Crisis Response – This group began last spring, rooted in a strong congregational desire to take meaningful action in the world. Its formation was a model of deliberate collaboration by motivated congregants and church leadership. Policy documents clearly laid out the purpose and practices, with steering committee leadership. And this year, that leadership has worked effectively and democratically, to bring inspiration and information to the congregation as a whole. It has been a highly successful partnership, and a governance learning experience.

Community Breakfast – This year saw a change in leadership and a large increase in the number of clients served. This service to the community is a meaningful congregational commitment, and a point of pride in the congregation. We are grateful to Carol Butt for getting this breakfast going and managing it for so many years, and to Todd and Jennifer Thomas for carrying it into the future.

II. Status of Minister Priorities

The three priorities for my work continue to be: Worship, Administration and Transition & Conflict. Here are some of our collective accomplishments and challenges in these areas. (Note: some of the challenges from last year are still listed, but others no longer apply!)

Worship

- The Worship Associates program expanded to 11 trained worship associates and processes are in place for managing services that are not led by the minister. The worship associates are increasingly able to provide continuity and oversight in services.
- Strong worship attendance, with ongoing appreciation for the collaborations among staff and others that create the container for this experience
- Greater variety and quality of music, thanks to consistent integration of music and expanded contributions from congregants (especially Chris Milkins), with leadership from Olga Martinez
- Transitioned leadership for Religious Services Team (special thanks to Dawn Dana for many years of leadership and facilitating the transition)
- Improved sound quality and processes for tech support during worship, as well as increasing the number and training of congregant MMTs (special thanks to Chris Whitaker)
- A wall-mounted screen for better visibility of song lyrics and other text and images (thank you Bob Franklin and Dick Dana)
- Offered 6 intentionally multigenerational services, in collaboration with the religious educator and with additional supports for young people. The Director of Programs for Children and Youth offered monthly Family Chapels, with a new time this year (9:30am), which allowed parents to attend the whole worship service.
- Friday Night Lights included a brief monthly whole congregation worship moment
- Challenge: Recruiting more, and more diverse, Religious Services Team members
- Challenge: Greater diversity in guest preachers and lay worship leaders
- Challenge: more opportunities for whole congregation worship experiences
- Upcoming Challenge: transitioning to a new minister, with different gifts and routines, while holding the practices that are important to this congregation

Administration

- Hired Congregational Life Coordinator and Tech Support Staff Person
- Began development of new website
- Social media presence
- The MOT has continued to expand its understanding of its role and processes, and is working more efficiently. Communication with the Board increased this year. With the addition of Linda Way and Reg Foster as members, the MOT has the capacity to offer some support and guidance to church teams – starting this year with the Social Justice Team and the MOT-initiated Social Justice Retreat.
- Brought compensation more in line with UUA recommendations
- More administrative documentation and organization of processes (*e.g.*, for routine events like the stewardship campaign and the annual meeting) – Sophia Garder continues to bring order to administration.
- First steps toward backup for Administrator (limited volunteer backup while the Administrator was away)
- Challenge: increasing capacity for backup for the Administrator
- Challenge: increasing congregational understanding of the AUU policy governance
- Challenge: communication within the congregation
- Challenge: adapting to the changing culture of volunteering that makes recruitment for long-standing leadership roles increasingly difficult
- Challenge: greater clarity around roles, power and authority – we’re making progress, but there is more to do. This will be a good topic for the upcoming ministerial transition

Transition and Conflict

- The Board’s decision to end the partnership with HOPE for Us brought that approach to conflict work to a halt. That said, the work has continued in intentional responses to situations as they arise, and in reflection afterward. These situations are learning opportunities, and I am increasingly seeing them approached as such.
- Developing and implementing the process for selecting the ministerial search committee was a huge undertaking that occupied most of the transitional focus for this year.
- I offered a series of sermons in the fall about covenant, accountability and boundaries, and we continue to explore those topics as they arise
- The Inclusivity Team has begun sharing their training about subtle acts of exclusion (microaggressions)
- Challenge: re-engaging the Transition Team. This is a very capable group that lost purpose this year. They might help connect the congregation to the search process if the search committee chooses to involve them
- Challenge: greater inclusivity for people with historically marginalized identities
- Challenge: continuing integration of children, youth and families into the congregation as a whole

III. Other Priorities

In addition to the 3 minister priorities for this year, we also collectively tended to other aspects of congregational life:

Community – the strong sense of community and capacity for care continues to be one of the great blessings of Albany UU. As always, the Caring Network and Pastoral Care Associates offer more formal care, but the people here routinely care for each other in beautiful ways. And the many social events and regular groups, including the new Friday Night Lights, provide gathering opportunities for all.

In last year's annual report, I lifted up the impact of our communication challenges on both welcome and connection. This is still a growth opportunity. But the ongoing work on role clarity and governance processes is noticeable. Let's keep that up.

I am also excited about the Inclusivity Team's ongoing educational program about subtle acts of exclusion (microaggressions). This has the potential to inspire even more progress in the coming year.

Social Justice – This year we began the process of considering and organizing social justice activities as an integrated whole. At the social justice retreat, we explored what that might look like. This was a strong beginning for the organizational changes that will support collective engagement. Thanks to Jean Poppei for her longtime leadership of the Social Justice Team and her help during this transition.

Ministerial Search – This year saw collaborative work, and a bylaw change, to support the formation of a Ministerial Search Committee that is best positioned to conduct a successful search this year. The collaboration between the Board and the Nominating Committee was not easy, but persistence and a spirit of goodwill resulted in an effective and transparent selection process. I look forward to the establishment of the committee, and the work they will do in the next year.

There is more that happened here this year, and I encourage everyone to read all of the reports. For this report, I want to lift up one more event – my stroke at the end of February. This created some disruption this spring, as I worked half-time, and took four weeks of complete medical leave in April. A ministerial colleague (Rev. Sarah Richards) filled in for some pastoral work. And you filled in the remaining gaps very capably. This is a testament to who you are, and your ability to lead and work together.

IV. Gratitudes

I close with a few expressions of gratitude.

First, the Albany UU staff: Elizabeth Baldes and Olga Martinez for reasons mentioned above; Sophia Garder for her rare combination of compassion, professionalism and organization; Paula Brewer for consistent support and care for the children; Adrian Cattell for his youth leadership; Michael Washington for taking on the critical tech support role; and Erik Von Hausen who

manages so many details with care and skill. I am grateful to serve with each and every one of you. And a special note of gratitude to the staff who report directly to me (Sophia Garder, Elizabeth Baldes, Olga Martinez and Nicholee Froese), who carried extra responsibility during my medical leave. I was able to step back without concern because I knew they would lead with their usual skill and dedication.

This year's Board handled some difficult decisions together with grace and care for the congregation. Board President Jan McCracken continued to provide leadership, but this year saw greater sharing of responsibility among Board members. I encourage continued movement in that direction.

This year's Ministry and Operations Team (MOT) was more effective and communicated better than last year's, as a result of the ongoing discernment of purpose and processes. This took considerable time and commitment – I am grateful to the team members.

And I am grateful for all of you who get things done, care for each other, and uphold our values in the world.

May we continue living our purpose in community, so this congregation moves into the future as the Albany UU the world needs.

In Faith and Gratitude,

Rev. Ann

Board of Trustees, President's Report 2025-2026

The Board of Trustees is a dedicated group committed to ensuring the health and well-being of our congregation. Our members include me, Jan McCracken (President), Jon Newell (Vice President), Maria Phillips (Treasurer), John Sherman (Secretary), Dawn Dana, Chuck Manning, Lea N'ko Ryman, Randy Rosette, and Rev. Ann Kadleccek, our non-voting member.

I am truly humbled to be among such a talented group, each of whom offers a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience. My aim is to harness our collective strengths to accomplish what we can achieve together, which is far greater than any one of us could do alone.

We are in a significant period of transition at Albany UU. On a personal note, I am confident that I chose the right time to take on the role of board president. As someone who thrives on change, I enjoy the work and engagement our transition calls for, bringing us together to discover our path forward. We are fortunate to have Rev. Ann Kadleccek serving as our Interim Minister. The Board benefits from her gentle moral authority and wise guidance. She brings much renewed vitality and growth to our precious, seasoned, and ever-emerging congregation.

While it may be obvious, it's important to acknowledge that our faith-based work is deeply amplified by the present threat of worldwide authoritarianism and the crisis facing democracy. The challenges we face not only highlight the importance of our mission but also call us to action in solidarity, resilience, and care for one another, as we navigate these turbulent times together.

Highlights of Accomplishments

- **Refining our System of Governance:** We continue to build a strong relationship between the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the Ministries and Operations Team (MOT). Since adopting a new system of policy governance, ministry, and operations eight years ago, we have made significant strides. Our leadership operates through two distinct circles—separate yet interconnected. As we break down organizational silos, we are intentionally collaborating to build better bridges that strengthen the connections within our Albany UU community. We encourage friends and members to share their talents and interests in a community of trust, creativity, and innovation in which structure, goals, and purpose are clear.

In recent years, the MOT and BOT have come together to improve the Albany UU infrastructure by developing policy, process, and procedures, spending wisely, and supporting our staff. The MOT and BOT held a joint retreat in December, where the Inclusivity Team presented a pilot version of the anti-racist training they developed on Subtle Acts of Exclusion. We provided feedback, support, and encouragement to disseminate the training to the whole congregation. The second half of the retreat focused on developing decision-making procedures that have culminated in tools for tracking, funding, and communication around Albany UU projects and initiatives.

As a congregation, we have always served as a beacon of light, committed to reaching out to our neighborhood, community, and the world in justice-seeking ways. As we adapt our internal practices, we also want to ensure our shared values are more present in the wider community. This will enable us to partner and build collaborative networks more effectively. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the MOT for their collaboration in helping us achieve both our present and future goals.

- **Launching the Ministerial Search:** In early fall, the Board commenced focused discussions to ensure the Nominating Committee would develop a process compliant with our Bylaw requirement for a Ministerial Search Committee (MSC). Recognizing the need for a timely revision of the bylaws, we wanted to better reflect contemporary practices and align our approach with the evolving dynamics of ministerial searches within our UU faith tradition. In February, the congregation voted to amend the bylaws, paving the way for an effective campaign to nominate members for the MSC. This involves reviewing applications to choose a single slate of candidates for the congregation's vote at the May Annual Meeting. As of this writing, the process is in full swing, and we are excited about the progress made toward finding a settled minister to guide our community forward. We thank the Nominating Committee for their extraordinary efforts in managing this time-sensitive process to build a strong Ministerial Search Committee.
- **Taking Fiduciary Responsibility:** With our eyes wide open toward long-term financial health, the Board must think beyond one-year line-item budget balancing. This perspective on sustainability includes financial resilience, programmatic continuity, good stewardship, good governance, being a good employer, and aligning spending with the vision, mission, and purpose. Yet we still need to run an effective Stewardship campaign and build a balanced budget in the here and now to work with for the coming year!

- For the past two years, the Board has refined its strategic approach in developing its annual budget. We meet throughout the stewardship season (January – April) and to gather information and draft the budget. We identify current priority areas that are anticipated to best meet the congregation's needs as we move into an uncertain future. The Finance Committee supports this process by collecting budget requests from the numerous ministry and operations teams and committees, compiling information for the Board to use in building the annual budget for the coming year. The Board holds congregational conversations in early May to provide members an opportunity for questions and answers about the budget, preparing them for a vote to pass the budget at the Annual Meeting. Thank you to all who contribute to our financial health in so many ways – giving your time, talent, and treasure.

As we move into an uncertain future, we recognize the need to expand income sources that generate revenue independently of pledge campaigns. By actively pursuing alternative funding avenues, we can reduce our strong reliance on member contributions alone. A multi-generational approach to this endeavor is needed. If you want to be part of a workgroup to imagine and create ways to enhance fundraising, please come forward!

- **Working with Conflict:** The Board continues its commitment to develop the framework for how we engage with conflict in our congregation. This year, we continued our work with the UUA's Hope for Us team, which helped us examine how conflict manifests in our congregation through a systemic lens. This approach generated awareness of rooted patterns of behavior, and with this understanding, we can continue to address what helps and hinders us in our approach to conflict. While we have suspended our work with Hope for Us, we are dedicated to fostering a culture of conflict engagement that promotes learning, growth, and change.

Much like pastoral care, effective conflict management is typically handled with confidentiality; those not directly involved may not witness the “labor” behind the “fruit.” There are many occasions where conflicts are not avoided but rather are addressed constructively, employing healthy practices and relational skills. These are good tools for managing conflicts before they “pop.” To further enhance our collective ability to work with conflict, we invite individuals with healthy relational skills to help build a community-wide toolbox for conflict resolution and engagement processes. If you would like to be involved in this initiative, we want to know!

- **Policy Development:** The Board remains committed to refining our existing policies, identifying new needs, and approving necessary updates. This fiscal year, we approved the following policies:
 - Public Display and Use of Congregational Banner and Other Representational Signage
 - Targeted Donations (a component of financial policy)
 - Youth Representation on the Board of Trustees
 - Joy Library Team
 - Ministries and Operations Team

In the upcoming year, we expect our policy development to focus on social justice and communication frameworks, as well as components of our financial policy. The Board typically holds a retreat in August to discern priorities and set goals for the upcoming year, with respect to ongoing assessment and financial considerations.

- **Striving for Transparency and Leadership:** Open communication and accountability are essential to fostering a strong, vibrant faith-based community that embodies our shared values and vision. The Board is dedicated to maintaining high standards of transparency within our operations and decision-making processes, extending beyond governance and operational circles to include all our teams, committees, groups, and staff.

We invite you to join us in this collective effort. We believe that the structural changes we are implementing at Albany UU will create opportunities for our members and friends to more easily participate and develop relevant leadership skills that align with our mission and vision. Together, we can strengthen our community and better serve our shared goals.

- **Acknowledgment of Departing Board Members:** We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Chuck Manning, who has dedicated four years of exceptional service, and to Jon Newell, who has served two years as Vice President. Both their prior roles on past boards, as Vice President and President, have further enriched our governance.

We truly appreciate the time, talent, and commitment that Jon and Chuck have generously shared. We wish them both a happy transition and restful days ahead.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan McCracken, Board President

Treasurer's Report for Fiscal Year 2025 - 2026

Background

Because our Annual Meeting is held in May and our fiscal year (FY) ends in June, the timeframe for the Treasurer's report can only include information through about three quarters of our current FY, from July 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

Highlights

Budget Approval

We approved the budget at the Annual Meeting in May 2025. A balanced budget of \$601,640, a 1.4% *decrease* from the previous year, was approved.

End Our Debt Campaign

We are in our second year of receiving payments toward pledges received as a result of the *End Our Debt* campaign. As of the end of March 2026, **\$388,408.21** has been received. The current building loan balance is **\$12,357.31**. Funds received after the building loan has been retired will be deposited in the Endowment Trust (ET) Operations Trust.

Financial Policy

Pieces of the financial policy have been written and approved by the BOT. The policy is expected to be completed in the next few months. These areas were approved:

- Designated Funds
- Procurement Decision-making
- Targeted Donations

Capital Reserve

We continue to contribute to the Capital Reserve Designated Fund. As of March, we have contributed \$29,498 to the Designated Fund. There is about \$146K in the Capital Reserve fund. Please see the table below for more information about funding for the congregation's Capital Projects.

Capital Reserve
March 31, 2026

Designated Fund Capital Reserve	Owner	Balance July 1, 2024	Year to Date			Ending Balance
			Income	Expenses	Net Change	
Capital Reserve	Treasurer	\$ 137,399.31	\$ 29,498.75	\$ 20,287.62	\$ 9,211.13	\$ 146,610.44

Capital Reserve Cash			
QB Account	Source	Account Type	Balance
1030 - MM	Capital Reserve	MM *3802	\$ 106,610.44
1055 - CD*		CD *6224	\$ 40,000.00

*CDs listed at initial funding level

Cash from ET Capital Reserve Fund**	
June 2023 Grant	\$ 1,196.24
June 2024 Grant	\$ 3,017.92
June 2025 Grant	\$ 4,718.66
Total	\$ 8,932.82

**Rolling grant which equals 3% of the Capital Reserve Fund Balance on June 30 of each FY.

Financial Status Summary as of March 31, 2026

Operations Financial Status

A summary of our operations' financial position, 75% of the way through our fiscal year, is summarized here and in the tables below.

At the end of March 2026, we held about \$134,175 in our checking account, Operations money market (MM) and CD accounts. In addition, our Designated Fund (DF) MM and CDs held about \$174,131. The table below shows how these funds were allocated. It shows that we held \$134,175 in Operations bank accounts, and we had about \$176,845 in outstanding budgeted expenses, leaving us with a need of about \$42,670 to meet our operational obligations. If we collect the \$137,642 of anticipated budgeted income and appropriately fund the Designated Fund accounts, we will end the fiscal year with a cash balance of about \$85K. There is uncertainty, of course, as to whether we would spend and collect these amounts. We will not know how the fiscal year ends until sometime in August.

At the end of March, we held about \$174,131 in Designated Fund MM and CD accounts, and we had allocated about \$178,992 to these DFs. The table shows we have allocated about \$5K less

than we hold in our accounts for DFs. These overages and shortfalls are periodically rebalanced to ensure funds are appropriately allocated.

The last line on this table displays our current indebtedness, which is **\$12,357.31**

FUUSA Cash Accounts as of March 31, 2026

(Totals may not equal sums due to rounding)

Bank Accounts				AUU Allocations	
QB Account	Source	Account Type	Balance	Category	Balance
1000 - Checking	Operations	Checking *1970 & 3562	\$ 68,909.55	Unspent FY 25/26 Budget (obligated expense) ¹	\$ 176,845.56
1001 - MM		MM *3570	\$ 25,265.82	Operations Cash in Bank	\$ 134,175.37
1020 - CD*		CD *7495	\$ 40,000.00	Cash in Bank-Remaining Exp.	\$ (42,670.19)
Operations Subtotal			\$ 134,175.37	>>	
1040 - MM	Other DFs	MM *3810	\$ 114,131.28	Total Designated Funds ³	\$ 178,992.74
1045 - CD*		CD *9911	\$ 30,000.00	DF Cash in Bank	\$ 174,131.28
1060 - CD*		CD *1993	\$ 30,000.00	Cash in Bank-DF Obligations	\$ (4,861.46)
Designated Fund Subtotal			\$ 174,131.28	>>	
Total Cash			\$ 308,306.65	Total Cash - Obligations \$ (47,531.65)	
Notes:					
*CDs listed at initial funding level					
1 and 4 - From Budget vs. Actual Report					
3 - From Designated Fund Report					
				Expected FY 25/26 budget income (minus CLC transfer) ⁴	\$ 137,642.89

Indebtedness as of March 31, 2026

QB Account 2046	ET Loan (0%)	\$ 12,357.31
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Endowment Trust Financial Status as of March 31, 2026

The table below shows how the **\$1,394,002.55** in total assets under the control of the Endowment Trust is invested and allocated among the various trusts. Note that the funds collected for the **End Our Debt** campaign are shown separately.

Endowment Trust Holdings as of March 31, 2026

Vanguard Investments:			
By Investment Type	Equities (VFTAX)	\$ 754,370.95	58.53%
	Fixed Income (VCEB)	\$ 534,148.00	41.45%
	Settlement Fund	\$ 267.02	0.02%
By Trust Allocation	Special Projects Trust	\$ 606,610.56	47.07%
	Operations Trust	\$ 119,771.88	9.29%
	Capital Reserve Fund**	\$ 161,419.83	12.52%
	End Our Debt	\$ 400,983.69	31.11%
Total Vanguard Investment (Total Return= 15.0%; Annualized Return= 2.9%)		\$ 1,288,785.97	92.5%
ET Building Loan (0%)		\$ 12,357.31	0.89%
Endowment MM *3794 (0.02%)		\$ 42,809.27	3.07%
Misc Cash			0.00%
End Our Debt and Operations Trust Donations Cash		\$ 50.00	0.00%
Loan to Community Loan Fund (1.00%)		\$ 50,000.00	3.59%
Total Assets		\$ 1,394,002.55	100%

** Total building loan repayment paid into Capital Reserve Fund = **\$130,075**

Conclusion

The financial outlook for the coming fiscal year will be challenging, even as we develop a balanced budget that does not contain a building loan payment OR income from unsustainable sources. The uncertain economic environment and changing membership needs will drive the decisions we make about the priorities for using our financial resources.

There is much to be enthusiastic about. Pledged income remains strong; fundraisers & rentals are stable. The membership answered the call to end our debt, leading to a higher likelihood of future financial sustainability. We can take pride that through your continued support our community enjoys good financial health. We can envision a bright future with reasonable assurance that we will have the financial resources to achieve it.

Submitted by Maria Phillips, Treasurer

Endowment Trust Report for July 1, 2025 – March 31 , 2026

Members: Steven Moskowitz, Chair; Barbara Manning; Zack Metzger; Lee Newberg; Hillary Torres and Maria Phillips, Treasurer (non-voting ex-officio member)

Purpose: The purpose of the Endowment Trust is to invest and manage gifts and bequests made to the Society by its members and other individuals or entities. We work to assure donors that their bequests will be honored and administered so that income from gifts will always be available to assist the Society in furthering its purposes.

Trust Notes: Please note that the following financial report is only for part of the fiscal year (July 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026) and does not specify interest accrued or market valuation changes during 2025/2026.

Financial Status Report:

Three separate funds are managed by the Endowment Trust. They are: Special Projects, Capital Reserve and Operations Trust. The table below shows the balance of each fund between 6/30/25 and 3/31/26. It also indicates the changes in each fund during the reporting period. Lastly, there may be some pending internal allocation changes at this point in the fiscal year.

	Special Projects	Capital Reserve	Operations Trust	Total
6/30/2025 balance	\$1,095,919	\$157,289	\$59,804	\$1,313,012
Gifts received	\$153,482	\$0	\$62,521	\$216,003
Building loan	(\$152,657)	\$0	\$0	(\$152,657)

Grants awarded	(\$20,092)	(\$0)	(\$1,483)	(\$21,575)
Grants not yet disbursed	\$15,947	\$0	\$0	\$15,947
Vanguard earnings	\$20,733	\$4,131	(\$1,068)	\$23,797
Misc.	\$521	\$0	\$2	\$524
3/31/2026 balance	\$1,112,811	\$161,420	\$119,772	\$1,394,003

Investments: The largest part of the Endowment Trust's investments was a \$575,000 interest free Building Loan to Albany UU made in 2006. As of March 31, the balance was \$12,357.31. Due to this very successful fund drive and the great generosity of the congregation, the Endowment anticipates retiring the entire outstanding loan by the time this report is distributed. So successful was the End Our Debt Campaign that the surplus raised will be deposited in the Operating Reserve Fund. **The Endowment Trust Board takes this opportunity to publicly thank its 2024-2026 End our Debt Campaign organizers, pledgers and contributors.**

Most of the liquid assets of the endowment are invested in mutual funds managed by two Vanguard Funds. These are index funds that make investments only in socially responsible companies and institutions. The trustees rebalance those funds on a periodic basis as appropriate.

Many years ago, the endowment had loaned interest-bearing funds totaling \$30,000 to the Community Loan Fund, a regional nonprofit financial institution that provides training, technical assistance, funding, & space for BIPOC and women-owned businesses. This year, the loan was increased to \$50,000.

One responsibility of the Endowment Trust is to attend to the long-term financial health of Albany

UU. In the past, the Endowment Trust Board agreed to set aside the re-payments of the Building Loan into the Capital Reserve Trust fund to help meet this need. This year, the fund reached the goal of \$150,000 and was transferred to the Endowment Trust's Operations Trust. Accrued interest and gains after the transfer are now held in the Capital Reserve Fund, along with any future designated donations for Albany UU's benefit.

Disbursements: At the beginning of each fiscal year, as soon as data is available, the annual grant making capacity of the Special Projects Trust is calculated for the coming year. The 2024/25 Special Projects Trust grant capacity was \$38,320.

The following projects received grants: Community Hall Sound System Improvement \$1,470; Safety Radios \$403; Sanctuary Organ Repair \$2,140; Banner Installation \$2,100; Publicity Photography \$750; Native American Art Installation \$2,000; Building a New Website \$11,500; and Choir Risers \$800.

Gifts: During the July 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026 period, a total of \$63,346 in gifts was added to the Trust. These gifts were in the form of gifts honoring birthdays as well as gifts from people who created a legacy. Additionally, \$152,657 was received towards the End Our Debt campaign to retire the building loan for Community Hall. Your contributions to the Trust are greatly appreciated and have been invested carefully to support the mission of Albany UU.

John Cross Legacy Society: The John Cross Legacy Society (JCLS) was established in 2017 to recognize members of Albany UU who have included the Society in their estate plans and to encourage others to do so. At the end of 2026, JCLS members are: Mary Applegate, Sharon Babala, Patricia Bailey, Elizabeth Berberian, Ann Brandon, Loren Broc, Tom Chulak, John Cooley, Albert De Salvo, Jeffrey English, Lois Griffin, Winston Hagborg, Katharine Harris, Cindee Herrick, Amie Jamieson, Chris Jensen, Barbara Manning, Chuck Manning, Jan McCracken, Meredith Mercer, Thomas Mercer, Betsey Miller, Paula Moskowitz, Steven Moskowitz, David Musser, Martha Musser, Jon Newell, Sigrin Newell, Rick Piet, Randy Rosette, Reese Satin, John Sherman, Margaret Sherman, Todd Thomas, Sam Trumbore, Nancy Wagner, Linda Way, Arlen Westbrook, and Nancy Willie-Schiff.

Our Impact: The Endowment Trust has an impact on our community in several ways. The trustees hold the trust of those who contributed by learning about and applying investment practices that honor gifts as well as promoting giving and granting opportunities. Members of Albany UU are encouraged to use the Trust to create a legacy, allowing their values to continue into the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Steven Moskowitz, Chair

Stewardship Committee and Donor Report

Co-Chairs: Alison Hart and Amie Jamieson

Members: This year's campaign drew on the talents of many dedicated volunteers. Chuck Manning, who led Albany UU's stewardship campaigns for many years, guided the transition to new co-chairs. Core team members Randy Rosette, Nancy Willie-Schiff, and John Sherman contributed to written materials, volunteer recruitment, pledge packet preparation, and team decision-making. Randy Rosette also managed pledge tracking, data analysis, and the spreadsheets central to campaign administration. Nancy Willie-Schiff and John Sherman conducted personal visits and phone calls to members and friends. Additional volunteers made Sunday Service testimonials (Peter Brown; Sarah Harney, Nate Shulock, and their toddler Quinn; and Kate Pierce-Nimz), conducted visits and calls (Linda Way, Dawn Dana, Dick Dana, Marty Hotvet, and Board of Trustees members), and assembled pledge packets (Peggy Sherman). The campaign could not have succeeded without the outstanding administrative support of Sophia Garder.

Purpose: The Stewardship Team plans and implements Albany UU's annual stewardship campaign. Because pledges represent approximately 85% of congregational income, a successful

campaign is essential to the health and growth of the congregation. This year, guided by Board President Jan McCracken, the team focused budget increase requests on four priorities:

- Support the dedication and skill of our staff;
- Celebrate our excellent services, music program, and growing children's programming;
- Maintain our historic building, including installing new boilers to keep us warm; and
- Prepare us for the ministerial search that will lead to an exciting new chapter in our shared journey.

Accomplishments: This year's campaign theme was "Shaping Our Shared Future," centering on Albany UU's commitment to being a model democratic community in which every member's participation matters. As the fundraising appeal expressed it: "Our work depends not on a few, but on the shared commitment of all of us."

The team also introduced a new, streamlined Fair Share Contribution Guide to help members choose an appropriate pledge amount. In keeping with Albany UU's commitment to inclusivity, those with greater resources were invited to pledge a higher percentage of their income.

Our goal for the 2026–2027 campaign year was \$525,000. As of this writing, we have reached 93% of that goal. We will evaluate the campaign by reviewing total pledges received, the number of new pledges, and the overall percentage increase in giving, among other metrics, to inform planning for next year.

Looking Forward: Our priorities for the coming year include developing documentation and tracking systems to streamline the campaign process and working with Sophia Garder and Randy Rosette to identify spreadsheet and administrative improvements. This year we will be sending printed acknowledgement letters from Rev Ann and Jan to everyone who pledges, and that next year we plan to create a system to issue emailed pledge receipts.

A Special Thank You: Alison and Amie extend their heartfelt gratitude to Chuck Manning for the invaluable institutional knowledge, support, and wisdom he offered as they stepped into their roles as co-chairs. We also thank Rev. Ann and Jan McCracken for their thoughtful feedback and signatures on campaign communications.

BOARD APPOINTED COMMITTEES

Finance Committee's Report

Committee Members:

Andrea Nix, (Chair, Insurance), Chris Edwardson, Kathy Harris, Karen Kaufmann, Assistant Treasurer (elected), Chuck Manning, Heidi Newberg, (Capital Reserve Planning), Maria Phillips, Treasurer (elected), Randy Rosette

Purpose of group: Is to ensure the healthy and sustainable financial functioning of the AUU, in both the long and short terms.

Activities in 2025-26:

- Continued to monitor the financial health and activities of the congregation.
- Solicited annual budget requests from all stakeholders and compiled a budget request document for submission to the Board.
- Evaluated many proposed projects forwarded from the MOT and/or project sponsors and communicated back regarding possible funding for these projects.
- As this was the Chair's first year, the Committee spent time educating her about the history and particular financial processes unique to the AUU.
- Secured an insurance renewal at a relatively reasonable price and learned that a new Insurance program is being created just for UU Churches.

Plans for Next Year:

- Continue to monitor the financial health of Albany UU carefully. Monitor cash flow and recommend adjustments to the budget as necessary.
- Continue to respond to the unbudgeted requests for projects forward by the MOT and others.
- Continue to monitor the capital reserve plan and propose adjustments where necessary. Report to the Board about any significant changes.

Notes for Next Year:

- This year we have noticed an increase in the number of unbudgeted project requests for funding. The process around these requests has been somewhat confusing, and we hope that a more regular process of communication can be achieved in the coming year.
- We note that financial sustainability has been identified as a community goal in the recent past. The Finance Committee would hope that the Church leadership will keep this goal at the forefront as budget plans are made final.

Nominating Committee's Report

This has been a rather busy year for our committee. So busy that we split into two subgroups. Nominating Committee subgroup for Officer Nominations with Jim Hutchins as Chair working with Luis Torres and Luanne Baker, and Nominating Committee subgroup to form a Ministerial Search Committee with Nellson Moore as Chair working with Vida Wehren and Zoe Hutchins. Both subgroups of the committee are hoping to present its slate of candidates at this year's annual meeting. Our committee takes its work for the congregation very seriously, always trying to stay focused on the big picture. This year we have received a great deal of support from Jan McCracken and Reverend Ann. As well as a good deal of hard work and elbow grease from Randy Rosette and Dawn Dana. We are looking forward to an upcoming quiet period before our next elections.

The MSC subgroup produced educational materials for the congregation, including a video and description of the process and timeline for choosing MSC members, and a fact sheet of the Roles and Responsibilities of the MSC. The subgroup worked with the BOT on changes to the bylaws and participated with BOT members in an in-person forum and a Zoom session to educate the congregation about the bylaw changes, as well as the process for choosing MSC candidates. Two forms were developed: a Request for Nominations form; and a Nominee Application form. A Windows Weekly article ran every week beginning March 6 through April 3. The subgroup also staffed a table during coffee hour beginning March 8 and ending April 5, the day the nomination period closed. In addition, subgroup members reached out personally to congregation members to encourage everyone to nominate individuals. The process of choosing a slate of candidates will include reviewing candidate applications, conducting interviews, and thoughtful consideration of broad congregational representation, each candidate's unique skills and abilities, and the ability of candidates to form a cohesive, well-functioning, and thoughtful committee.

The "Regular" subgroup is in charge of finding nominees for the Board of Trustees, Endowment Committee and Nominating Committee. The work has been extra challenging this year because many likely "regular" nominees are interested in serving on the MSC. We staffed a table during coffee hour and we have been reaching out to different potential nominees. We also have received a great deal of support from Jan McCracken and Reverend Ann.

Personnel Committee's Report

Chair: Molly Daniels

Members: Carolyn Stetson, Linda Hunt, Dawn Dana (Board Representative), Rev. Ann (Head of Staff)

Purpose of the Committee

The Personnel Committee provides oversight and recommendations to the Board of Trustees on personnel matters for Albany UU including recommending search committees for non-ministerial positions, delivering candidate profiles and suggested offers, and proposing changes to benefits and compensation. Following approval from the Board of Trustees, the committee supports employment offers, onboarding procedures, policy implementation, oversight of benefit and compensation, and workplace conditions. Additionally, it facilitates communication between members and staff, oversees performance management in consultation with the head of staff, and manages the annual review process as well as yearly communications to staff regarding compensation and benefits after budget finalization.

Accomplishments in 2025–2026

In collaboration with Rev. Ann, the committee developed and implemented a standardized annual benefits and compensation letter for staff.

The committee managed an updated job description for the Congregation Life Coordinator, recruitment efforts, and formation of a search team comprising Molly Daniels, Olivia Dunn, Sharon Babala, and Rev. Ann. This resulted in a hiring recommendation for Nicolee Froese as

part-time Congregational Life Coordinator, which was endorsed by the Board of Trustees. We consider this a successful hire!

Following Ben Warner's departure from the Tech Support role, the committee initiated a similar recruitment process. The search team included Carolyn Stetson, Chris Jensen, Chris Whitaker, Sophia Garder (Supervisor), and Rev. Ann, with support from Molly Daniels. Michael Washington was subsequently hired with Board approval.

A comprehensive review of the Personnel Manual commenced, incorporating best practices and exemplary materials shared by the UUA Benefit and Compensation office, including a reference to a recently revised manual from another Unitarian Universalist congregation.

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Successes

The creation of job descriptions, recruitment, screening, interviewing, and hiring processes is notably demanding. The committee extends appreciation to all individuals who contributed support throughout these efforts.

Future Goals and Initiatives

The committee seeks to expand its membership and aims to present a draft of an updated Personnel Manual to the Board of Trustees by the end of the next calendar year.

Additional Information – Leadership Changes, Meeting Frequency and Format

The committee typically convenes monthly and schedules additional meetings as required for time-sensitive matters such as hiring and budget preparation.

Transition Team Report

Co-chairs: Peggy Sherman and Betsey Miller

Members: Ireta London, Jon Newell, Léa N'ko Ryman, Stephanie Saunders

Purpose: To work with the Interim minister in whatever tasks she thinks would be helpful in the transition to a new minister.

Accomplishments: We were not as active in 2025-2026. The Board and the minister were working with the nominating committee on how to form the search committee. At first we were asked to provide support, but it was decided it was best for the other three groups to do this process. Our one major accomplishment was creating and publishing this document titled [“Why does the world need Albany UU? What is our congregation's purpose?”](#)

Plans for the upcoming fiscal year: To continue to support the minister and provide information to the search committee on the work we have done.

Safe Congregation Team Report

The Safety Team has been working this year to develop and refine protocols for responding to various emergency situations which might occur on Sunday mornings. These include medical incidents, evacuation emergencies and shelter-in-place situations. Last year, the Albany Police conducted a walk through our building to help us identify areas that should be addressed in meeting our safety goals. A new Sunday morning volunteer position has been created - the Sunday Morning Safety Coordinator. This person's role is to be the main point of contact with the other Sunday leaders in emergencies, as well as with first responders should they need to be summoned. The Albany UU Sunday Morning Safety Manual was written and approved by the Ministries and Operations Team and the Board of Trustees. Funding was secured from the Endowment Trust for the purchase of radios and headsets that will be used to communicate in emergency situations. Key Sunday morning leaders - the Worship Associate, Lead Usher, Welcomer, PCY Leader and the Sunday Morning Safety Coordinator - are assigned radios each Sunday morning so that critical information can be shared clearly and quickly. Incident reports have also been developed so that the types and frequency of incidents can be reviewed.

The Safety Team will continue to refine and update safety procedures. This may include developing protocols for church events on days other than Sundays, such as the Community Breakfast, and for Building Hosts to follow during rental events. There is also a plan to provide additional trainings on topics such as first aid/CPR, administering NarCan, and de-escalation strategies.

The Sunday Safety Team has put in an enormous amount of effort to create this framework with the sincerest hope that their work will never have to be used. Much gratitude goes to the Safety Team and to the Sunday Morning Safety Coordinators for working to keep us all safe.

MINISTRY AND OPERATIONS

Ministry and Operations Team Report

Members: Bob Franklin, Rev. Ann Kadlecsek, Linda Way, Reg Foster

Purpose: The Ministries and Operations Team (MOT) is responsible for implementing the vision, mission, and purpose of the congregation within the limitations and expectations set by the Board of Trustees (BOT) and is accountable to the BOT. The relationship between BOT and MOT is one of interdependence and collaboration. The MOT will work with the various non-governance Ministry Teams to help define, clarify, and guide their ministry and operations. MOT's role is to foster connections among congregational teams, councils, and committees, with the aim of strengthening collaboration and minimizing duplication of efforts.

Accomplishments:

- We developed an MOT policy document that records our basic purpose, structure and procedures. This is a living document to be reviewed regularly.

- We developed an MOT job description based on the policy document to assist in member recruitment.
- We developed MOT recruitment material and strategy.
- We reviewed submissions for projects from teams and individuals; advised applicants on next steps; and worked with BOT, Fiscal Committee and Endowment Trust to determine funding needs of projects.
- We planned and conducted an SJ retreat/workshop, and prepared and distributed a report on the proceedings.
- We helped to plan and conduct a joint BOT/MOT retreat.
- We are developing an Initiative Tracking System to be in use by the end of the fiscal year.
- We liaised with the many committees/teams/groups to provide support and assistance.
- We worked on improving communication and coordination with BOT, Finance Committee and Endowment Trust around approval and funding issues.

Challenges/lessons learned/successes: Over the course of the year, we developed a concern that the many aspects of social justice needed to be reviewed to assess the need for coordination and prioritization, and that many of the efforts might benefit from increased structure.

Goal:

- We will continue to build tools to support BOT policies.
- We will support and assist the social justice teams and groups in developing more structure and procedures where needed.

WORSHIP AND FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Religious Services Committee Report

Chairperson: Peter and Debbie Brown

Members: Rev. Ann Kadlecek, Dawn Dana, Alison Hart, Peter Meixner, Randy Rosette, Linda Way, Olga Martinez, Elizabeth Baldes

Purpose: The Religious Services Team (RST) helps plan Sunday services with pulpit guests, arranges for our annual This I Believe service, and coordinates services during the summer. We support and assist the Worship Associate/Service Assistant corps and maintain and update instructions and scripts for many service roles. We assist pulpit guests in coordinating their service planning with the Worship Associate, PCY Director, Music Director, and Albany UU office staff. The RST provides input on service logistics and flow. We provide support to the minister in shaping our service year. An overarching goal is services that are of high quality and welcoming to all.

Service Planning and Logistics: We have worked closely with Rev. Ann to plan the service year and assess service rituals and logistics. Among the areas where RST has provided input and helped to implement changes are:

- Announcements
- Joys & Sorrows
- Congregational Greeting
- Attendance monitoring and recording
- Order of Service (OOS) format and content
- OOS online accessibility
- Access to service rituals on Zoom

Worship Leadership: A key area of effort this year has been upgrading and refreshing the Worship Leadership program. Training for service associates was offered, and several new associates were added to the list. One objective has been to open service roles to a wider group of congregants, and to expand opportunities for an active role in service planning. The practice of offering an opportunity to offer spoken reflections on the service topic has been effective. We will review how the program is functioning and particularly when there is a guest in the pulpit. We hope to be able to offer training on a regular basis.

Pulpit Guests and Special Services: Pulpit guests this year have included Chris Bystroff, Brian Frank, Dave Munro, Randy Rosette and Chris Jensen, Nellson Moore, Anny Lapinski and Pam Clements, Rev. Leonisa Ardizzone and Debbie and Peter Brown. Yet to come are Rev. Lyn Cox, Rev. Dr. Aaron Shoken Proffitt, Dan Berggren, Rev. Sarah Richards, and our youth with Elizabeth Baldes

Summer Services: RST was pleased with response to and attendance at our eleven summer services in 2025. Eric vonHausen served successfully as our Summer Services Coordinator and will again in 2026. RST has been working in recent weeks to plan a full schedule of 2026 summer services, running from June 22 through August 31. Speakers will include Chris Bystroff, Rev. Christin Green, Rev. Shelley Page, Nellson Jacobs Moore, Rev. Ann, Rev. Lynn Ashley, Diane Cameron and others who have been invited but not yet agreed to speak.

Goals: Goals beyond the continued provision of rewarding and challenging services include especially expanding membership of the team and of the Service Associates team.

Membership: Three of the 25-26 team members have moved to other church commitments: Alison Hart has refocused on efforts with the Worship Associates, Randy Rosette and Peter Meixner have each served many years on the team and are seeking to add membership from other and diverse members of the church community.

Worship Associate Group Report

Chairperson/Convener: Rev. Ann Kadlecak and Dawn Dana

Members: Sharon Babala, Debbie Brown, Peter Brown, Dick Dana, Jeff English, Alison Hart, Dave Munro, Lee Newberg, Peggy Sherman, Carolyn Stetson

Purpose and Goals: The group was established to provide more robust opportunities for lay participation in worship. The program has been built upon our long-running Service Associate program but has created a trained cadre of congregants who are capable of deep involvement in worship planning and presentation. Three goals were identified when the program was initiated by the Religious Services Team in February 2025, under Rev. Ann’s guidance and encouragement:

1. to increase the opportunities for trained lay worship leaders to offer reflections in services;
2. to provide organization and coherence with the overall worship vision for services that are not minister-led;
3. to invite new people into worship leadership.

Accomplishments: The initial training offered in February 2025 created a team of six Worship Associates (WA). The new role was kicked off in April 2025 and continued through our regular service year. The team got more experience with the “project management” aspect of worship planning through the summer of pulpit guests. With the lessons of the February training, a new training session was offered in November, increasing the WA group to eleven. We have continued to gain experience with worship services under Rev. Ann, and with a variety of pulpit guests, including congregant worship leaders. Many of the WAs have offered reflections connected to the worship theme, finding this to be both personally meaningful and deeply appreciated by many in the congregation. The group meets every other month to debrief recent services, discuss worship service matters, and schedule WA assignments for the coming months. A key new area of activity is defining the role and procedures of the WA in the Sunday morning safety program. Although Rev. Ann has provided critical leadership in the group’s establishment, we are now working to put in place lay leadership to sustain the program beyond Rev. Ann’s interim ministry and into the commencement of our new settled ministry.

Programs for Children and Youth Report

Staff: Elizabeth Baldes, Director of Programs for Children and Youth

Paula Brewer, Programs for Children & Youth Assistant

Adrian Cattell, Lead Youth Group Advisor

Bella Scaringe, Childcare Provider

Weekly Program for Children & Youth Volunteers

Amy Jesaitis (sub)	Kate Pierce-Nimz
Ann Von Linden	Kevin Yeh
Annabelle Taylor-Schick	Kristen Tibbitts

Brian Frank	Leah Purcell
Britany Orlebeke	Liz Richards Hart
Cathy Vaughan	Mary Fellows
Dana Kowalchyk	Sam Schick
Hillary Torres	Sandy Stone
Jeffrey Sedam	Saylor Skidds
Jen Berkun	Sarah Stanwicks
Jen Quail	Stephanie Saunders
Jill Peckenpaugh	Tyler Nimz
Jim Hutchins	Zack Metzger

Albany UU's Programs for Children & Youth (PCY) is overseen by Elizabeth Baldes, who can be reached at ebaldes@albanyuu.org. Programs for Children & Youth provide ongoing opportunities for children and youth to explore shared Unitarian Universalist values in an engaging and supportive community environment, with the goal of supporting their search for truth and meaning along with their spiritual and ethical development. PCY also coordinates provision of childcare and ensures compliance with safety guidelines in accordance with Albany UU policy.

The 2025-26 church year has been busy. Our new childcare provider brought a breath of fresh air to the Nursery/Toddler Room, and we started a preschool group for 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds. Our early-elementary Our Whole Lives course was enthusiastically received by participants and their families, while upper elementary explored UU practices of community, care, and justice. Middle school tried out a new curriculum of Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints, continuing their exploration of pluralism and introducing a strong social justice aspect. Youth Group took listening as their focus for the year and are hard at work for their annual service taking place on April 26th. They also continued their monthly Dungeons and Dragons games. In addition to Sunday morning age-based groups, monthly Family Chapel and Friday Night Lights events, plus occasional multigenerational services, were offered.

A notable accomplishment this year is the establishment of the picture book library, which has been quite successful. With all books relating to at least one UU value, it is an accessible and easy way for kids to take home a little bit of Sunday morning each week. We also experimented successfully with opening one of the classrooms to families on Sunday mornings for social time. Another bright spot is Family Chapel, which moved to a new time of 9:30AM and is flourishing, thanks to support from all our Sunday morning volunteers- guides, greeters and welcomers, our

planning partners, Olga Martinez, Director of Music Ministry and volunteer Lois Bailey, and of course the families and friends who attend. Our Bridging program also expanded to include support for parents of fledgling youth, and we repeated last year's successful Bridging Retreat.

Staff members Paula, Adrian, and Bella each brought flexibility, dedication, and care to their work. The staff is fortunate and grateful to be supported by the Programs for Children and Youth Council, Rev. Ann Kadlecek, Olga Martinez and Music Ministry, and the volunteer guides, all of whom make our nurturing community and our programs possible. Other partners this year included the Congregational Life, Sunday Morning Safety, Green Sanctuary, Community Breakfast, Suddenly Adults Swarming, Inclusivity, and Social Justice teams.

Goals for the coming year include exploring additional ways to support parents and caregivers, offering Our Whole Lives for upper elementary and junior high, and continuing to find creative ways to respond to the challenges inherent to current family life.

Programs for Children and Youth Council Report

Group: Programs for Children & Youth Council

Contact Person: (Name, Title) Karen Strong & Luis Torres, Programs for Children & Youth Council Co-Chairs

Members: Sarah Fisher, Lucia Haber (Youth Rep), Lois Bailey, Doug Matthews, Patti Jo Newell, Danielle Ricard, Luis Torres, and Kevin Yeh.

Purpose: *The Purpose of the Council is to foster and maintain programs for children and youth that:*

- *Support the spiritual, philosophical, ethical, and faith development for children, youth, and families,*
- *Practice our shared Unitarian Universalist values of justice, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, and generosity, guided by the love that connects us.*
- *Be responsive to the needs of diverse families of the congregation and our community, and*
- *Create a safe, nurturing, and welcoming environment where individuals and families can learn and grow.*

Vision: Albany UU Programs for Children and Youth is a vibrant, inclusive, and multigenerational community where children and youth are an integral, valued, and active part of our congregation. By working in covenant the PCY community-- children, youth, families, staff, and volunteers--can be their true selves while they learn, participate, and cultivate lifelong commitments to our shared Unitarian Universalist values of justice, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, and generosity, which are guided by the love that connects us.

Mission: The mission of Albany UU's Programs for Children and Youth is to empower the next generation to live our shared Unitarian Universalist values in the world by practicing those values in a welcoming community that nurtures spiritual growth and encourages meaningful connections within and across generations.

Accomplishments: The Council continued to work on governance this year, officially submitting the policy and completing a Practices and Procedures Manual to support onboarding and institutional memory.

The Council endorsed a youth member on the Board of Trustees and a policy to support their appropriate participation.

To implement their newly adopted mission and vision to build connections within and across generations, Councilors regularly staffed the “RE Office Window” on Sunday mornings as PCY greeters, hosted the annual PCY park gathering in September as well as Coffee Hour at Halloween, after the Christmas pageant, and after Sundae Sunday. The Council sent HUUGS (Huge UU Greetings) to Albany UU’s fledgling young adults, contributed monthly KUDOS in Windows Weekly, and made an effort to interact regularly with the congregation on behalf of PCY.

This year, the PCYC also continued to increase our own multicultural competency, building on our Mistakes and Miracles group read in 22-23. We updated our Beloved Community Covenant and made time in three monthly meetings to participate in the Subtle Acts of Exclusion training developed by Albany UU’s Inclusivity Team and delivered by Joyce Chicone and Sorrel Harrow.

Challenges/lessons learned/successes: Continual recruitment and preparing descriptions were useful. Practices and procedures took longer than we expected but were well worth it.

Goals: Helping parents whose children are aging out of the program find their place.

Additional information: The Programs for Children & Youth Council has continued to check in with the priorities identified in the 2022 [final report](#) by Interim Religious Education Consultant, Michele Townsend Grove, as well as the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results work we did in August 2024. We look forward to building on the strong foundations established in recent years and growing in community with each other, the PCY community, and Albany UU as a whole.

Music Ministry Report

Director of Music Ministry: Olga Martinez

Team Members

Music Assistant: Cathy DeMille

Collaborative Pianist: Chris Milkins

Music Associates: Randy Rosette and Chris Jensen

Music Librarian: Zoe Hutchins

Responsibilities:

The Music Ministry exists to explore, inspire, and deepen our faith through music. It also grows and evolves and in doing so reflects Albany UU's growth, evolution, and its aspirations for the future.

Every music moment and decision at AUU is approached with the intent to have it aligned with the Unitarian Universalist faith and values. We take into account our participants' experiences from the opening note to the last song of each service or event. Our work draws from a multitude of resources including our hymnals: Singing the Living Tradition, Singing the Journey, Sing Out Love (the new UUA virtual hymnal), as well as from a diverse array of familiar and unknown composers.

The Music Ministry is responsible for planning, producing, and providing musical experiences across various offerings at Albany UU, including, Sunday Services, Family Chapel, Christmas Eve, Special Services, Community Events, Memorial Services, and Friday Night Lights. The Director of Music Ministry plans, in collaboration with the minister, guest ministers, the Director of PCY, guest musicians, and guest speakers. The music is chosen with the purpose of creatively expressing the intended message of the service or event. The DMM recruits musicians and coordinates weekly music rehearsals for vocal and instrumental music for individuals, small groups, and the adult choir.

This year, AUU Music Ministry coordinated music and was on the planning team for the Hudson/Mohawk Cluster Service. This has involved working with the keynote speaker, ministers and music directors from each church involved, choirs, and with musicians. This also involved facilitating group music selection focused on the goals of the keynote speaker. Additional responsibilities include website management, music production, and technology to support all involved.

Participants in Music Ministry

Albany UU Choir

The 36 member, AUU adult, mixed-voice choir contribute to the spiritual life of AUU. We continue to welcome new members. The Director of Music Ministry schedules time for extra practice before rehearsals, for new and longtime members. Rehearsal files are provided for at home practice. The choir works in a variety of repertoire. Frequently pieces have been arranged for them by the director and/or the collaborative pianist. Rehearsals include vocal warmups, vocal pedagogy, and music theory skills, as needed.

The choir participates in the yearly Hudson Mohawk Unitarian Universalist Cluster service. The choir also enjoys sharing social time together at dinners and at their annual picnic.

Adult Choir Members:

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| ● Pat Bailey | ● Tim Bullis | ● Chris Bystroff |
| ● Peter Brown | ● Carol Butt | ● Michael Crowell |

- Dick Dana
- Liza McKinley
- Randy Rosette
- Cindy Dean
- Barbara Metz
- Leá N'ko Ryman
- Cathy DeMille
- David Metz
- Ruth Samuels
- Sandi Erickson
- Jon Newell
- Russell
- Melissa Fleck
- Sigrin Newell
- Alexis Sanborn
- Kathy Harris
- Threasa Pasquale
- Sam Schick
- Tanya Hotalen
- Astrid Pettersen
- Janet Smith
- Linda Hunt
- Debbie Reep
- Nancy Wagner
- Zoe Hutchins
- MacLeod
- Chris Whittaker
- Chris Jensen
- Neil Rice
- Patricia Zima
- David MacLeod
- Deborah Rodriguez

Musicians

Many musicians have played at our services throughout this church year. Some from within and some from outside of our church community. The Music Ministry is grateful for the talent and time contributed by these many wonderful musicians.

- Anna Baldes
- Tanya Hotalen
- Randy Rosette
- Charlotte Baldes
- Chris Jensen
- Alexis Sanborn
- Rich Baldes
- Griffin Kullas
- Sam Schick
- Dan Berggren*
- Theo Matthews
- Julie Shaw
- Chris Bystroff
- Vincent O'Neil
- Miquela Torres
- Dick Dana
- Rowan Pigott
- Ben Warner*
- Cathy DeMille
- Albany Voices of
- Bailey Whiteman*
- Nicholee Froese
- Pride*
- Chris Whittaker
- Ann Marie Haber
- Deidre Quail

Collaborative Pianist

This past year we made a decision to allocate resources towards a collaborative pianist, and the benefits to our worship experience have been significant. Chris Milkins serves as our collaborative pianist and will continue in this role. With Chris at the piano, alongside a song leader, we have had stronger congregational singing and more focused leadership for the choir. The congregation has also benefitted from the collaboration between our Director of Music Ministry and Chris's skill at arranging new and familiar music. The collaborative pianist is involved in rehearsal and service/event support. Feedback from throughout the church has let us know that Chris's involvement has been widely appreciated.

Family Chapel

This year, the Programs for Children and Youth partnered with the Music Ministry to create meaningful and rich worship service opportunities for families. We integrate themes and music between our main service and youth service using beloved traditions, the UU principles, and

music that engages our children, youth and their families. We have had several guest musicians join us in Family Chapel: Lois Bailey, Rich Baldes, Cathy DeMille, Chris Milkins, Alexis Sanborn, Chris Whittaker, and Theo Matthews.

Annual Holiday Pageant:

Programs for Children and Youth and the Music Ministry collaborated on a Solstice Pageant this year. We had musical support from the AUU choir and from the congregation. And it seemed a few singing evergreens, as well. We were glad to expand and enrich our holiday celebrations this year.

Christmas Caroling -In collaboration with Randy Rosette

AUU Choir led a holiday sing-along at the December Community Breakfast. It was greeted with enthusiasm!

The choir and congregation members visited the homes of congregants to spread holiday cheer and song. This is an annual tradition led by the AUU choir. It feeds the spirit of the carolers as well as the recipients. One of the UUs visited mentioned, “It warmed her heart and it was truly healing”.

Christmas Music Jam- In partnership with Ann Marie Haber

This annual event is a welcoming space where every musician can participate in creating holiday joy. Channing Hall is filled with activity while holiday music is played on a range of instruments from strings to brass, percussion to harmonicas. The room is buzzing with busy children, people singing along with songs they recognize, cookie crumbs and smiles.

Organ Repair Project

In December 2023, Olga informed the MOT that the organ in the sanctuary was in need of serious repair. Two years, many meetings, and many donations later, the organ was ready for Christmas Eve 2025. Our beloved organ rang out joyfully. The Organ should be fully functional by Fall 2026 with two additional repairs.

Professional Development

Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries (AUUMM)

The Director of Music Ministry is a proud member of the AUUMM. This is a professional organization of Unitarian Universalist music directors and associated professionals. The formal workshops and informal interactions foster an exchange of music and ideas that consistently enhance our AUU music experience. Olga is also on the AUUMM Nominating Committee.

AUUMM Virtual Workshops Attended (with Music Assistant)

- *Cultural Context of Music in Worship: Music as Cultural Transformation*
- Songs for Rallies and Protests
- Vocal Warm-Ups & Techniques for Choirs
- Sing Out Love: An Orientation in Song

- Singing Through the Generations: Worship Wars, Music Heresies, and Sound Innovations
- Singing Our Theology: An Incomplete Introduction
- Songs Beyond the Hymnal

NERFA

This year to learn more about our regional folk musicians. Olga volunteered with NERFA (Northeast Regional Folk Alliance) and met with many well-known musicians local to our area. She is excited to bring their music to AUU and continue nurturing those relationships into the future.

Collaborative Mentoring

Music Assistant: Cathy DeMille

The Music Assistant position has evolved from music librarian to music assistant. Cathy, who has served in the role since Fall of 2022, has been trained in using online music platforms and is assisting in music production. Music Ministry has plans for additional training and is grateful for her hard work, willingness to learn new technology, and dedication to music at AUU.

Respectfully submitted,
Olga Martinez, Director of Music Ministry

Mindfulness Meditation Report

Chair: Anny Lapinski

Purpose: to meet weekly for a dharma lesson, meditation and sharing. We are working on forming a small committee to help facilitate the group

Accomplishments: We have met every Sunday all year with a mix of one in person session and the remaining sessions on zoom. Participation is regular (about a dozen people) and personal sharing and support has grown.

Goals: to do some other activities like show a movie, do an in-person workshop etc.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ADVOCACY

Social Justice Team Report

Contact person: Jean E Poppei, Chair/Team Leader

Members: Michael Braunstein, Carol Butt, Matthew Colins, Larry Gambino, Anne Marie Haber, Winston Hagborg, Ed Hancock, Marty Hotvet, Karen Kaufmann, Philomena Moriarty, Martha Musser, Lee Newberg, Jean Poppei, Sandy Steubing, Ann von Linden, Deborah Vogel, Vida Wehren.

Purpose: The Social Justice Team works to create a more just, equitable, and compassionate world for all by putting our faith into action as we address social and economic injustices—for example, participating in the Delmar and/or Troy anti-racism vigils on Saturday mornings (weather permitting). SJT offers guidance and education regarding social issues of moral and ethical significance. This can occur through forums, discussions, and calls for action. The Social Justice Team is provided with a yearly budget so that we may initiate and/or encourage activities that promote social justice, both in our wider Albany community and beyond. SJT can also sponsor a limited number of reduced or free rental spaces at Albany UU for groups that might not be able to hold their event otherwise.

Accomplishments: The Social Justice Team is particularly proud of the new Share The Plate, which replaces SJT's previous (five) Give Away The Plate actions. Now, each month, a worthy charity group is chosen, initially by the Social Justice Team but now opened to the congregation for nominations. The program raised over \$13,700 for charitable groups in its first six months, while also increasing collection income for Albany UU.

Goals or initiatives for the coming year: The Social Justice Team needs to create and implement Policy and Procedures that have been lacking since the bylaws were changed to eliminate the elected Social Responsibilities Council. SJT will also work with members of other groups doing social justice work at Albany UU to coordinate efforts.

Monthly meetings: The Social Justice Team meets virtually for its formal meeting, usually on the fourth Tuesday of the month, evenings from 6:45p to 8:00pm. All are welcome to attend. In addition, at any time the Team Leader/Chair (and other members) can reach out to the Social Justice Team, often for a vote on a particular matter.

Additional Information: I, (Jean Poppei), have stepped down from the position of Team Leader/Chair of the Social Justice Team, but plan to remain an active member.

Democracy Crisis Response Steering Committee Report

Committee: Democracy Crisis Response Steering Committee

Acting Convener: Chuck Manning

Members: Nick Moscatiello, Carol Butt, Paul Fisk, Karen Kaufmann, Hugh Johnson, Ella McGrail, David Musser, Leah Purcell, Chris Whittaker, Reg Foster (MOT rep), Jan McCracken (Ex Officio member)

Purpose:

- Engage the congregation in training, informing, outreach, and education on actions that combat threats to democracy.
- Help congregants address elected officials on issues related to threats to democracy.
- Research events sponsored by national and local organizations so that we can be part of something much larger.

Accomplishments:

- Created the Democracy Crisis Response email list to inform congregants of witness events, educational opportunities, and resources for spiritual renewal.
- Created guidelines for a weekly bulletin with events, opportunities, and resources that is now sent to the email list every week.
- Sponsored a presentation by Kelly Gourley, Director of Operations at Refugee & Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus, on 2/18. The topic was identifying ICE agents and activity and what to do if you encounter them. Kelly also discussed the general situation with ICE in the Capital District.
- Promoted UUA ICE Out Phone Call Blitz in February to our congregants.
- Visited downtown businesses to ask them to post a sign we created to assure patrons that immigrants were welcome at their establishment.
- Sponsored a sign-making party to gather and carpool before the October 18, 2025 and March 28, 2026 No Kings rallies.
- Made and distributed yellow scarves for Albany UU folks to wear to rallies and witness events to show that, as UUs, we side with love.
- Created a subgroup to investigate the possibility of supporting a general strike.
- Preparing to offer UU the Vote activities.

Challenges/lessons learned/successes: Jan McCracken was instrumental in helping us to create decision-making processes and protocols to recruit more members to our Steering Committee. We learned to always keep our UU values in mind in our messaging inside and outside the congregation. Our mailing list has over 100 members.

Goals:

- Possible follow-up presentation from Kelly Gourley on what we are willing to risk.
- UU the Vote.
- Events to educate the congregation on a General Strike.

Additional information: Paul Fisk was the original convener but let the steering committee know he needed to move away from that role. Chuck Manning became the acting convener. Chris and Greg joined the Steering Committee in March. Ella McGrail is the faithful and dedicated editor of the weekly bulletin sent to DCR members. Leah Purcell was the note taker and submitted this report.

Community Breakfast Report

Coordinators: Todd & Jennifer Thomas

Chefs: Erik von Hausen, Jeffrey Sedam, Robbin Dzembo, and Sandy Stone. Additionally, dozens of volunteers contribute to the success of each breakfast.

The Community Breakfast team prepares and serves a monthly breakfast in Channing Hall for anyone in the local community who seeks a warm meal in a welcoming environment. While the primary audience is individuals experiencing food insecurity, all guests are warmly welcomed. The meal is often complemented by second meals “to go”, along with toiletries and clothing donated by the congregation.

In 2025-2026, the leadership of the breakfast underwent a transition. Todd and Jennifer Thomas assumed the role of coordinators, succeeding Carol Butt, who initiated, nurtured, and led the Community Breakfast since its inception. Our congregation is grateful to her for her leadership and dedication.

This year, guest attendance has surged by nearly 50% compared to the previous year, presenting us with a budget and space challenge that we will be managing in the coming months. Our guests feel genuinely welcomed at AUU, as evidenced by their attendance at Sunday services and Friday Night Lights events. The volunteer commitment has been robust, and the youth of the congregation have prepared hundreds of “second meals” for guests, using funds raised through their silent auction. We’ve also noticed that newer members and friends have been volunteering at the Breakfast as an initial step in becoming part of the church community.

Administratively, the congregation has provided substantial funding in the annual budget, and at our request, the AUU Board approved the continuation of the Community Breakfast designated fund. The volunteer sign-up process has shifted to Breeze, thanks to the efforts of Lois Bailey and Sophia Garder. A modest request for kitchen safety and efficiency improvements is currently under consideration by the AUU Endowment Trust, and we anticipate action on that request soon.

Next church year, we will continue to explore ways to integrate the Community Breakfast into the core of AUU, adjusting processes to ensure that this community outreach becomes an institutional event. We also anticipate further refining the food and non-food offerings at the breakfast, based on the needs of our guests. The congregational support for the Community Breakfast is strong, and we are committed to the continued success of this monthly event.

Green Sanctuary Team Report

Members:

Chuck Manning, Chair

Barbara Spink, Secretary

David Musser and Barbara Spink, Webpage Administrators

Carol Butt and Chris Bystroff, Social Justice Team Liaisons

Marty Hotvet, Religious Education Council Liaison

We keep in touch with over 60 Albany UU members and friends about environmental issues. Refer to the GST email list. We average 13 members for our meetings every month.

Purpose: Our goal is to preserve the global environment on which all life depends by working to make the Earth sustainable and by addressing climate change, consistent with our Unitarian 7th principle, which is respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Accomplishments:

GST continues to recycle items in the cloakroom. These are listed on our [website](#) link, with new updates on places to recycle items. The recycling bookshelf was reorganized with the addition of a booklet for other recycling resources.

We presented research of AI data center energy usage to the congregation, and provided ways to reduce AI use online and in emails.

We conducted a new survey of the congregation about their renewable energy usage and followed up with questions from participants.

We organized a constructive visit with our new Assemblyperson, Gabriella Romero.

Members voted to support several organizational sign-on letters in support of environmental legislation and rallies. Members collaborated with other environmental and democracy groups in our area (See [Partners](#)).

Members lobbied for the environment in the NY legislature or attended rallies and demonstrations in support of the environment, such as Save Our Climate Law Rally, Deadline Hochul rally, the Plastic Reduction Act lobby day, Better Bottle Bill Act lobby day (Beyond Plastics), Third Act Solar legislation, data centers and pipeline protests, the NY HEAT Act, and the [Fund Climate Campaign](#) of NY Renews.

GST wrote a group letter, and members made calls, sent postcards and emails, to the Governor in support of the NY State Climate Law (CLCPA). GST also wrote a group letter to the federal government supporting the Endangered Species Act. Members also wrote and called to the Governor and legislature regarding Beyond Plastics initiatives, the Energy Innovation Act, and renewable energy in general.

Chris Bystroff continued to monitor voting practices in NY State. Many GST members participated in UU the Vote to encourage non-Partisan voting in special elections. Members supported Democracy by attending No Kings and Hands Off Rallies in Albany.

We tabled at Third Act's Sun Day on 9/23/25,

Hugh Johnson arranged for GST to enjoy biking outings together.

Members picked up trash along the Hudson River in Albany (Riversweep) for Earth Day in 2025 and there will be an Earth Day clean-up at the Watervliet parking area of the Mohawk Hudson Bike Trail on April 18, 2026.

GST sponsored coffee hours and postcard-signings at coffee hour.

Carol Butt worked with the Community Breakfast to have clothes and toiletries for the community offering, thereby reusing donated items.

Forums:

- 2025-6-12

A forum on ways to save Democracy with speaker Mary Panzetta of BMV Huddle, in collaboration with UU youth.

Member's Articles and Letters to the Editor:

- 2025-05-04; Paul Fisk

Commentary on the first 100 days of President Trump's second term [Letter to the Editor](#) published in the *Times Union*

- 2025-05-02; Barbara Spink

Pass the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act

[Letter to the Editor](#) published in the *Times Union*

Challenges and Successes

With both the federal government and NY State government walking back on past environmental initiatives and accomplishments, the number of issues we have to address has risen while at the same time, members are feeling discouraged. Additionally, our Democracy is being threatened daily, and this has divided the energies of our Team. Despite the difficulties, members are not throwing in the towel and continue to be active in standing up for the environment and Democracy (See [Gallery](#)).

Upcoming Activities:

GST members will continue working with [our partner organizations](#), attend rallies, lobby, write letters, work with our Youth, present forums, recycle, have postcards at coffee hour, monitor activity of the federal government, and practice sustainability. Specific issues the GST will defend include NY's Climate Law, requiring AI and cryptocurrency data centers to use renewable energy and adhere to environmental regulations, stop fossil fuel subsidies, support bills that encourage the use of solar energy, support efforts to reduce the use of plastic, support the bottle bill, education of the dangers of micro and nanoplastics in our food, clothes etc., and support the Democracy Crisis Response Team.

Sheridan Preparatory Academy Volunteers Report

Reporter: Martha Musser

Supporting our neighborhood school is an important social justice activity at Albany UU. The relationship between the school and Albany UU, however, has changed since the beginning of the pandemic. The coronavirus and growing neighborhood violence still affect Sheridan Prep. The enrollment has declined from over 400 to around 320. Many children lost academic ground

during the pandemic. Pre-school children lost the opportunity to participate in groups outside the home, leaving them unprepared for kindergarten.

Purpose: Albany UU members seek to support a neighborhood school which serves children of color from low-income families, some of whom are immigrants. We support the school by volunteering in the classroom and in other school activities and by providing financial support for the playground, field trips, and other events. Our collaboration with Sheridan Prep contributes to fulfilling every part of the church's vision. Generosity lifts the hearts of volunteers who contribute time or money and broadens their minds by giving them a better understanding of poverty and racial disparity.

Accomplishments: This year, the number of approved volunteers for classrooms is nine. Other UUs have helped with school activities outside the classroom. Sheridan Prep enrolls a significant number of Spanish-speaking students, who are in the early stages of learning English. Three of our classroom volunteers are bilingual and their assistance is especially needed at Sheridan Prep.

One important effort, led by Chuck Manning, has been focused on acquiring additional outdoor space. In 2020 and again in 2025, the Albany County Land Trust transferred without cost the vacant lots at 129 and 131 Sherman Street to the school district. Funds donated by Albany UUs were used to pay the closing costs. These purchases provide the school with a space 33' wide and 165' long to use for outdoor learning and play. Before we begin to create the desired outdoor learning space, we need an approved plan and the necessary funds. A survey is being completed so that the project can proceed. The designated fund for Sheridan Prep now contains over \$5,000 donated by individual UUs and will be collecting more funds to make the needed improvements to the lots.

With the assistance of Marc Daniels, beginning in the 2023-24 school year, Sheridan Prep has a Trout in the Classroom release program. This nationwide environmental education program brings a tank of baby trout to the classroom to teach students about the lifespan development of trout. Finally, students release the trout into local waters, teaching them about watersheds. It fosters a new generation of advocates for trout and the watersheds in which they live.

The Albany UU operational budget allocated \$2,000 to Sheridan Prep for field trips. Many families cannot afford the cost of taking their children to sites around the Albany area. Albany UU help is critical to ensuring that students have access to opportunities that middle-class children enjoy routinely. With our help, the fifth grade is taking an end-of-year trip to the Bronx Zoo, an experience that many Sheridan Prep families could not afford for their children.

Plans for next year: We hope to bring more volunteers to the classroom. The Albany UU operational budget will again provide funds for field trips. Our most important effort will be focused on ensuring that the necessary improvements are made to the Sherman Street lots to provide space for outdoor learning and play. Development of the additional playground/outdoor education space will begin.

End of Life Choice Task Force Report

Co-Chairs: Nancy Willie-Schiff, Dave Munro

In keeping with UU values and a 1988 UUA General Assembly Resolution on Death with Dignity, and as part of the Social Justice Team of Albany UU, the Task Force continued its efforts to advance personal autonomy at the end of life through advocacy for New York's Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) Act. After years of advocacy by members of this congregation, other UUs across the state, and other organizations, New York finally passed MAID! Our actions in 2025-26 leading up to, and following, passage included the following:

- Welcoming new members to the Albany UU End-of-Life Choice e-mail group;
- Using WINDOWS WEEKLY to encourage Albany UUs to advocate for MAID;
- Partnering with Compassion and Choices New York to advocate for MAID;
- Partnering with New York UU Justice (NYUUI) to involve the statewide UU community in advocacy for MAID;
- Organizing and leading a NYUUI Vigil at the New York State Capital in fall 2025 to urge the Governor to sign MAID;
- Organizing, and making individual financial contributions to, a celebration of the passage of MAID held on March 14, 2026, at Yono's in Albany; and
- On March 15, 2026, hosting a celebration of MAID's enactment at coffee hour and welcoming Corinne Carey, Campaign Director for Compassion and Choices New York, to give a presentation in Community Hall about the final version of MAID that was signed by the Governor on February 6, 2026, and that will take effect on August 5.

Going forward, the Task Force is considering a role in providing educational opportunities to Albany UUs and the larger community about end-of-life issues and what we can all do to plan.

FOCUS Food Pantry Report

FOCUS is an alliance of downtown Albany churches and faith affiliates (including Albany UU) that operates, among other services, the Interfaith Food Pantry at the Emmanuel Baptist Church on State Street. For many years, Albany UU designated the fourth Sunday of each month for a service collection in support of the Food Pantry. That practice was ended this year with advent of the "Share the Plate" program, under which all Sunday collections are split with charities designated monthly. Going forward, FOCUS will be the designated charity for sharing the plate three months each year, thus benefiting from the same number of collections annually (12) as under the prior practice.

In FY 25-26, prior to the advent of Share the Plate in October, \$553.26 had been collected for FOCUS. It was the designated charity in the first month of the Share the Plate program, and \$2,618.24 was collected. FOCUS was also designated in April and will be designated twice more in calendar 2026. If the October collection was any indication, AUU's contributions to FOCUS should be higher under Share the Plate than under our former practice.

Inclusivity Team Report

Contact Person: Joyce Chicoine, Chair

Other Team Members: Jean Poppei, Karen Kaufmann, Kate Steere, Lee Newberg, Linda Hunt, Mary Baker, Michael Hornsby, Sorrel Harrow, Deborah Vogel, Dick Dana, Jan McCracken

Purpose: To build a diverse, multicultural beloved community and dismantle racism and other oppressions within our congregation.

Accomplishments in 2025-26: We developed training materials for teaching congregants about Subtle Acts of Exclusion (SAE, also known as Microaggressions) based on the book by Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran. Presented the material to Ministerial and Operations Team (MOT), Board of Trustees (BOT), and Programs for Children and Youth Council (PCYC). We plan to share this curriculum with other groups and individuals in the congregation.

We planned a full-day conference called Building Beloved Community Beyond the Binary, which will take place on April 18, 2026. We are a site-host for a nationwide UU conference. We will have our own local speaker and a clothing swap, in addition to viewing workshops presented in Syracuse via Zoom. The conference, which is co-sponsored by SJT, is for and about people who are trans, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming. Friends, family, and allies of this community are also welcome.

Challenges/Lessons Learned/Successes: One challenge faced by the Inclusivity Team is that many members of our team are also members of the Social Justice Team. Given current events, SJT activities have received increased attention, and members' active involvement in the Inclusivity Team has decreased. Some members have withdrawn from the Inclusivity Team all together. Other team members have moved outside of the area or had to pull back due to personal health concerns.

Goals Or Initiatives Planned for the Coming Year: We plan to continue to present the SAE curriculum, which includes discussion and role playing, with additional groups of the congregation. Our goal is to train at least one member of every committee or team of our congregation.

We expect that we will again be a site host for Building Beloved Community Beyond the Binary in 2027. Besides watching workshops via Zoom, we hope to have our own presenter(s) on topics such as supporting partners of trans and non-binary people and the best ways of advocating for rights of trans and non-binary individuals.

Octavia Butler Book Group Report

Organizer: Anne Marie Haber

Facilitator: Karen Strong

Other committee/group members: There are 44 people on our mailing list (see groups.io), and 8-10 regular participants. Facilitation each week is shared.

Purpose: The Octavia Butler Book Club at Albany UU was started by then Rev. Sam Trumbore in the Fall of 2021, growing out of the Racial Healing Workgroup with the goal of examining racism and white supremacy through fiction. We began by reading Octavia E. Butler, the Mother of Afrofuturism, a sub-genre of science fiction. And we continue to focus on Afrofuturism, as it enables us to learn about racism, white supremacy, and oppression.

Accomplishments: In 2025 and 2026, we re-engaged with Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents, with the added dimension of the newly published graphic novels, with artwork by John Jennings.

Successes: Outreach before starting Parable of the Sower and hosting a coffee hour brought on new members. We find it useful to regularly discuss and update our covenant.

Goals: In the summer, we will read short stories. In Fall 2026, we will start reading other Science Fiction and Afrofuturist novels.

Additional Information. We meet (roughly) weekly since we started in 2021. The first four books we read (Parable of the Sower, Parable of Talents, Wild Seed, and Mind of My Mind) were guided by Octavia's Parables, a podcast by adrienne maree brown and Toshi Reagon. We finished Octavia's Patternmaster series without a podcast.

In April 2024, the Octavia Butler Book Group continued in a new branch of Afrofuturism with N.K. Jemisin's The City We Became, followed by The World We Make. We've also read Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown, Bloodchild – a book of short stories and essays by Octavia Butler, and Octavia's Brood – a book of short stories inspired by Octavia Butler.

Black Lives Matter Troy Vigil Report

Organizer: Anne Marie Haber

There are usually 5-10 people who come per week.

The purpose of the group is twofold: 1) to express that Black Lives Matter and, 2) to inspire passersby to act against racism.

We meet weekly, throughout the year, weather permitting, meeting for 30-45 minutes, at the intersection of Fulton, Third, and River Streets, in Troy, holding signs that say, "Black Lives Matter," "Stand Against Racism," and "Act Against Racism." It is difficult or impossible to place a quantitative measure on the effects of expressing antiracism sentiments and inspiration of passersby. We can only say with certainty that people stop and thank us and sometimes stand with us. We are placed at the busiest intersection in Troy on Saturday mornings, as people come from all over the region to shop at the Troy Farmers Market and to patronize the Downtown businesses and organizations, so we are visible to a large number of people who pass by on foot, by bicycle, by car, and by bus.

We encourage each other to keep to our covenant (below), especially when we have negative comments and/or hecklers. At times, it is a challenge to remain in covenant.

To ensure safety as much as we can, we are working under these agreements as a provisional covenant:

We carry signs with the same message: “Black Lives Matter,” “Stand Against Racism,” or “Act Against Racism.”

We limit our positive responses to a thumbs-up or a wave.

We do not respond to any negative reactions, such as heckling.

One person will be designated to take photos of license plates of anyone who is inappropriate.

We all leave at the end of the vigil, and people leave together. 45

If friends join us, we advise them of the measures above.

If you can’t or don’t want to join, standing or sitting (bring your own chair), you are invited to drive by and wave or honk encouragement.

In the coming year, we plan to continue our mission:

- a) to express that Black Lives Matter and,
- b) to inspire passersby to act against racism.

Leadership is decentralized, and we make decisions by voting. We often gather casually, after the vigil, to discuss current events, personal matters, and social justice work.

DENOMINATIONAL RELATIONS

New York Unitarian Universalist Justice (NYUUIJ) Report

Contact Person: Peggy Sherman serves as treasurer and board member of this state-wide organization.

Other group members: Many Albany UUs have participated with NYUUIJ in online meetings and actions at the State Capitol.

Purpose: To connect Unitarian Universalists with one another and with partners who share our values; learn from those most engaged in the struggle for justice and follow their lead; and activate collective power to advocate for a just New York.

Accomplishments: UUs led by Nancy Willie-Schiff were active in the successful advocacy for the enactment of the Medical Aid in Dying Act. With assistance from Compassion and Choices, UUs held their own vigil at the Capitol on Friday, November 14. On Saturday, November 15, with the support of the Social Justice Team, NYUUIJ held its second statewide meeting at Albany UU and online. The Justice Convocation drew more than 70 participants, both in Albany and online, representing 18 UU congregations. The day featured worship, workshops to learn about social justice issues and opportunities to connect with UU from across the state.

The NYUUIJ Program Manager organized monthly zoom calls, providing background on issues ranging from housing to solitary confinement to immigration and offering direction on ways to take action.

Members of Albany UU continue to be the leading participants in advocacy days at the Capitol and provided essential volunteer support for the Justice Convocation. Albany UU continues to support NYUUIJ financially and by serving as its fiscal sponsor, for which NYUUIJ is grateful.

Challenges: Annual contributions and grants to NYUUI have not been sufficient to fund a half-time staff position, so our Program Manager's position will end at the end of June 2026.

Looking forward: The third NYUUI Justice Convocation is scheduled for Saturday, November 7, 2026 at Albany UU and online. We hope to involve and connect more New York UUs in their justice work in the coming year.

UU Connections Team (UUA, GA, NYSCU, CER) Report

Chairperson/Convener: Dawn Dana

Members: Jan McCracken, Leah Purcell

Purpose: This team was created to promote, support and coordinate Albany UU's active participation in the Unitarian Universalist Association, as well as its connections with UUA member congregations and affiliated organizations. A primary function is to organize and coordinate congregant participation in UUA General Assembly and to recruit and credential the congregation's General Assembly delegates. We also monitor and disseminate regional (Central East Region) offerings and encourage attendance at relevant trainings and conferences.

Accomplishments: A full delegate slate of seven enthusiastic Albany UUs attended the June 2025 General Assembly in Baltimore, MD. Delegates included Mary Applegate, Dawn Dana, Dick Dana, Molly Daniels, Jan McCracken, Jean Poppei, and delegate convener Leah Purcell. In October, Peggy and John Sherman served as AUU delegates to the annual meeting of the NYS Convention of Universalists, held in Canton, NY. General Assembly in June 2026 will be all-virtual, with a theme of Together, Everywhere. It has an innovative schedule, with all General Business sessions concentrated in the first 2.5 days, followed by a 2-day pause, and then all programming and worship services taking place during the final 3 days. A team of 7 delegates is being assembled at the time of this writing. Our goal is making the opportunity for participation available to congregants who might otherwise not have access to General Assembly.

UU Weekend at Silver Bay Report

Co-Chairs: Meredith Mercer & Mike D'Attilio

Members: Ann D'Attilio, Barb Manning, Barb Metz, Betsey Miller, Bob Franklin, Darnell Rohrbaugh, Dave Metz, Elizabeth Berberian, Jaye Holly, Jill Peckenpaugh, Laurie Beberwyk, Meredith Mercer, Mike D'Attilio, Reese Satin, Sigrin Newel, Vanessa Cayford

Purpose: UU Weekend is an inter-congregational and intergenerational retreat which takes place at Silver Bay Conference and Family Retreat Center located on the shores of beautiful Lake George, New York. This retreat provides an opportunity for UUs and friends to come together to enjoy the beautiful Fall foliage and to participate in spiritual, physical, and fun-filled activities.

Accomplishments: Last October (2025-the 32nd annual gathering) 260 people from 10 congregations and 8 states attended this event that had over 60 offerings. Since this was a 3-day holiday weekend, 140 participants opted to stay the extra night. There were thought provoking workshops such as "What is a Good Life", "Coping with Disaster", "Overview Mini Session on

Owl”, and “Empathy Express”. Many participants also enjoyed fun workshops such as Star Island Beads, Tarot Readings, Art with Recycled Materials, Drawing, Pickleball, Campfires, Guided Paddling on the Lake, Sing a Longs, Gong Baths, Sound Meditations, Dance Meditation, Photography, Croquet, and Yoga. There was a large selection of programs for children and youth. Some of these activities included a haunted house, hayrides, climbing wall, pumpkin art, capture the flag, face painting, archery, temporary tattoos, and making fairy houses. For those opting to stay the extra night, we were excited to offer a late afternoon cruise on the Horican cruise boat to view the beautiful Fall foliage along with appetizers, cash bar, and music to listen and dance to by the Baldes Family.

The Keynote Speaker is always a highlight of the weekend. Our **Keynote Speaker** was Rev. Kathryn Beilke who works for Beyond Plastics. Rev. Kathryn Beilke discussed not only the far-reaching implications that plastic has for our planet and health, but also the variety of solutions the Beyond Plastics’ advocates across the country are working on and the imperative to act now. Because not only is plastic a climate change issue, an environmental justice issue, and a health issue but it is a moral issue which urgently demands our attention and action.

Our Worship Service was led by 2 retired ministers, Linda Anderson and Marge Allen who are members of the Schenectady UU Church.

Food and entertainment were abundant. There is a store on the property for gifts, ice cream, and a variety of snacks. Meals were served buffet style in the beautiful dining room that caters to a variety of dietary needs. The Saturday afternoon Social gave participants a chance to mingle, snack, enjoy beverages, and to meet new people. The silent auction during the social helped raise funds for future programming and scholarships for others to attend. Evening entertainment included campfires with stories and s’mores, open mic, puzzles, games, English Country Dancing, and Karaoke.

Successes: Participation was so great that we filled the Silver Bay campus to capacity. It was a challenge to find housing for everyone.

2026 dates: Come join us on October 9-11 and optional 12th for another inspiring weekend. Thus far 140 people have registered, of which 74 will spend the extra night. Our Keynote Speaker will be Professor Eric K. Stern from the University at Albany. He will stimulate thought-provoking discussions with his presentation on Artificial Intelligence. The retreat will be a lot of fun with many programming options including spiritual, personal growth, informational, and challenging programs and activities. NYSCU (New York State Convention of Universalists) will hold their Annual Meeting as part of UU Weekend. What a great way to spend a Fall weekend with the mountains and lake in peak color.

For more information including a registration form and a copy of the current draft schedule, please look on the Albany UU website

<https://albanyuu.org/blog/uu-silver-bay-weekend/>

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Congregational Life Team Report

Reports to: Ministry & Operations Team (MOT)

Members: Sharon Babala, Dick Dana, Nicholee Froese, Ilene Kane, Amy Lent, Barb Manning, Shellie Petrie, Stephanie Saunders, and John Sherman. Linda Way is the liaison from the Ministry and Operations Team (MOT).

The Congregational Life Team is comprised of several different “sub-teams”: Social Events, Membership, Sunday Volunteer Opportunities, and Communication. Each of these teams is led by a member of the Congregational Life Team.

Social Events Team Members: Bob Franklin, Randy Rosette, Paula Moskowitz, Sharon Babala, Pat Bailey, Mary Ann Jablonowski

Welcomers and Greeters: Elizabeth Berberian, Debbie Brown, Mollie Daniels, Cindy Edwardson, Ilene Kane, Amy Lent, Barb Manning, Jan McCracken, Robbin Newton, Shellie Petrie, Kelli Smith

Communication Team Members: Amy Lent, Nicholee Froese

Purpose: The Congregational Life Team (CLT) serves as the umbrella for Membership, Social Events, Coffee Hour, and other aspects of congregational life at Albany UU.

We are charged with creating a warm and welcoming experience on Sunday mornings, providing an inviting pathway for newcomers to explore membership, and supporting opportunities for members and friends to build connections that are deep, joyful, and enriching.

Accomplishments: This has been a year of growth, creativity, and expanding connection within our congregation.

We introduced a new monthly program, Friday Night Lights, offering a relaxed and welcoming space for people of all ages to gather for food, conversation, and community-building. This program has quickly become a meaningful point of connection across the congregation.

Our congregation-wide events continue to be well attended and deeply appreciated. The annual Potluck and Talent Show in March once again highlighted the creativity and spirit of our community. Instead of the Blossom Bash this year, we are looking forward to a **Congregational Picnic at Thacher Park on May 30**, an informal opportunity to share good food, fresh air, and great company in one of our region’s most beautiful settings.

Small-group connections continue to play an important role in fostering deeper relationships within the congregation. Circle Dinners, coordinated by John and Peggy Sherman, offer members and friends the opportunity to gather in more intimate settings, helping people get to know one another beyond Sunday mornings. Participation in these gatherings remains strong. We are especially grateful to John and Peggy Sherman for their many years of dedicated leadership in organizing Circle Dinners, sustaining this meaningful ministry of connection within our congregation.

Our newcomer and membership programs remain strong. Getting to Know Unitarian Universalism (GTKUU) was offered twice this year, once in its traditional three-session format and once in a revised two-session format, welcoming several participants each time. We also celebrated new members through two recognition services, honoring the seven youth and nine adults who joined the congregation.

Membership, as reported to the UUA, was **317 as of January 2026**, reflecting encouraging growth over the past year. While we continue to experience the natural transitions of members moving, resigning, or passing on, we are also welcoming new individuals and families into our community. It has been especially heartening to see an increase in families and young children, bringing new energy and vitality into congregational life. More and more people are sharing that Albany UU is a place where they feel a genuine sense of belonging, underscoring the strength of our shared commitment to welcome, connection, and community.

Communication and visibility have also significantly improved this year. With the addition of the Congregational Life Coordinator role, our social media presence is now consistent and engaging, helping to share the life of the congregation both internally and outwardly.

Within the building, the Communications Team completed a full refresh of the bulletin boards in Channing Hall, creating visually appealing, up-to-date communication spaces. These updates also better align with other initiatives, including space for the Social Justice Team near the planned Donation Station. We have also updated the look and feel of our flyers and promotional materials for programs and events, creating a more cohesive and recognizable visual identity across platforms.

We continue to grow and strengthen our roster of members who serve as Greeters and Welcomers on Sunday mornings. These roles are essential to creating the warm, inviting first impression that defines Albany UU. It has been encouraging to see more individuals step forward to participate in this ministry of welcome, helping to ensure that newcomers and returning members alike are greeted with friendliness, care, and connection as they enter our space. This shared commitment to hospitality reflects the spirit of our congregation and plays a vital role in helping people feel that they belong from the moment they arrive.

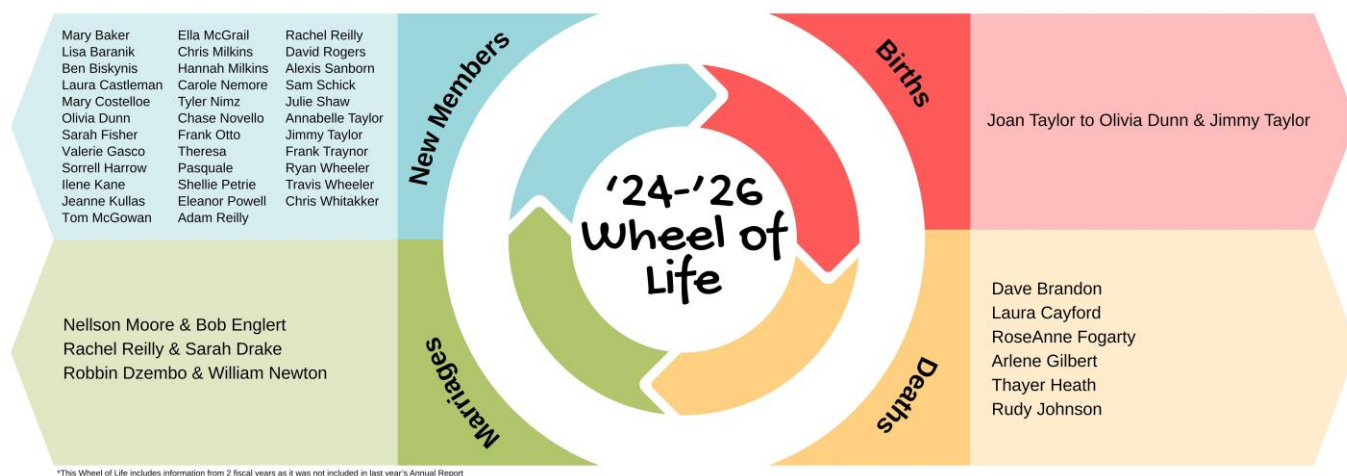
Also, in the area of hospitality, we opened Coffee Hour hosting to the broader congregation, with two families stepping forward to host. While this is a positive step, we continue to seek a Coffee Hour Coordinator(s) to help sustain and grow this important ministry of welcome.

Plans for Next Year: Looking ahead, the Congregational Life Team will continue to build on this year's momentum, sustaining existing programs while expanding our capacity to welcome, connect, and engage both current members and those just beginning their journey with Albany UU.

We plan to:

- Continue and grow Friday Night Lights as a regular monthly gathering
- Offer Getting to Know Unitarian Universalism (GTKUU) sessions twice next year
- Hold New Member Recognition services for both youth and adults

- Continue congregation-wide social events, including the Talent Show and the Congregational Picnic
- Strengthen Coffee Hour by increasing shared leadership and support, including the Congregational Life Team hosting one Coffee Hour per month as a structural step toward making this vital ministry of connection more sustainable by reducing the number of weeks that need to be filled by volunteers
- Support the transition of leadership for Circle Dinners, as John and Peggy Sherman plan to step back from their long-standing role as organizers. They have generously offered to work alongside those stepping into the role to ensure a smooth and successful transition, and we look forward to continuing Circle Dinners as a vibrant part of congregational life.
- Increase community outreach by participating in local events to raise awareness of Albany UU
- Continue developing welcoming pathways that support individuals and families from first visit to active participation
- The Congregational Life Team remains committed to fostering a vibrant, welcoming, and connected community where all can find belonging.



Growth Through Service Team Report

Chair: Dick Dana

The Growth Through Service (GTS) program is designed to connect congregation members with opportunities that foster personal growth, new friendships, and greater connection with the church community. GTS is also about creating connections among members of our congregation through serving a higher purpose, something greater than one's own individual needs. A key premise of the program is that part of being a UU is serving others and each other, and that by serving, one grows as a person.

Purpose: The primary role of GTS is to hold a conversation with each member of the congregation. The purpose of these conversations is to learn about their aspirations, to explore what opportunities here at Albany UU might best fulfill those aspirations, and how they might take advantage of the opportunities here to participate in the life of the congregation.

Some members find connection simply by attending the service once a week but may be interested in exploring other opportunities in future. Wherever you are on your journey, the Conversation Leaders want to hear about it.

A second role of the GTS Team is to maintain an up-to-date collection of descriptions of every service opportunity at Albany UU, no matter how small, and to post that information on our website for all to see. We have heard many new members use the term “overwhelming” to describe the process of learning how they might fit into our community and where the best opportunities are for them to contribute. Making these descriptions available to all takes some of the mystery out of who we are and what we do together as a congregation.

Accomplishments: We continue to hold conversations with members of our church community, with special emphasis on new members, working towards the goal of conversations with every willing member of our community.

The Team regularly provides groups such as the Nominating Committee, the Ministry and Operations Team, and the Congregational Life Team, with suggested names of members who might be interested in filling vacant volunteer positions.

This year the Team was charged with an additional task, to familiarize new members with the process of annual pledging, and to answer any questions they might have about pledging.

Goals for next year:

- To continue to reduce the small backlog of long-time members who have yet to have a conversation.
- To update the Service Opportunity Descriptions on our website to include newly formed teams such as the Congregational Life Team.

Suddenly Adults Swarming (SAS) Report

In its two years of existence, Suddenly Adults Swarming (formerly YAG [Young Adult Group]) has greatly increased its membership. We have grown from two committee heads to a Breeze mailing list of thirty-three and a consistent attendance of five to twelve individuals, depending on the event. We have also started including childcare options to encourage young adults with children to attend our events.

Our current regular events include:

- Monthly supper club (rotates date and eatery location; open to everyone on the mailing list)
- Monthly D&D session (last Friday of the month at 7pm)
- Quarterly letter-writing campaigns (open to the Congregation)

- Annual Halloween Party (every October)- consists of movie and snacks
- Annual Holiday Party (every December)- with white elephant element

Previous events include:

- Spring trash clean-ups around Albany UU
- Nature/bird walks at local preserves

For this year, we have decided to continue the monthly supper club and do one “Event” each month. So far this year we have done the following:

- January:
 - Supper Club 1/18
 - D&D 1/30
- February:
 - SAS Brunch 2/15
 - Letter-writing Campaign 2/16
 - D&D 2/27
- March:
 - SAS Brunch 3/21
 - B5 Cleaning Day 3/22
 - D&D 3/27

Future Events for the year we have scheduled include:

- April
 - Roller-skating outing at Guptill’s 4/10
 - D&D 4/24
- May
 - Tulip Fest outing
 - Fire tower hike
 - D&D 5/29
- June
 - D&D 6/26

This year is the first year in which we are requesting a SAS budget line in the Annual Budget to offset the out-of-pocket costs for snacks and materials provided at events. We also want to use this money to create a “Supper Club Fund” to make meal outings accessible to more individuals.

Overall, we have received tremendous support from the Congregation and Church Leadership in keeping this group alive and growing. We see SAS as a place to build community and connections that will continue after members have aged out. We, as the SAS organizers, make a conscience effort to lift up other Albany UU events such as the Annual Talent Show, Wine & Cheese Night, DCR Efforts, etc. We believe that the more connected our members are to the congregation, the better for the health of our group and the church.

Receptions Team Report

Contact: Maryann Jablonowski and Barb Manning

Other Members: There are 11 people on our mailing list (see groups.io) with significant assistance/contributions from members of the congregation on an as-needed basis.

Since the beginning of May 2025, the Receptions Team has provided:

- Memorial Service receptions for Laura Cayford (8/30/25) and Rudy Johnson (4/13/26)
- Homecoming Lunch (9/07/25)
- Christmas cookie reception organization (12/24/25)

The Memorial Service reception provided food and beverages for attendees. As Lead Coordinator, we talked to family, the attending minister and Church Administrator (Sophia Garder) to find out what a family wants for a reception and to coordinate putting that together. Our other reception volunteers helped with providing some of the food, set up, clean up and prepping food donations brought by the rest of our church community.

For the Homecoming Lunch, the Receptions Team coordinated the food contributions brought by the Team and many members of the congregation. The Team did the room and food set-up, facilitated the food presentation and clean-up.

For the Christmas Eve cookie reception, which takes place between the two Christmas Eve services, the Team set up the room, provided some of the cookies, organized the contributions brought by the rest of the community, and cleaned up.

Throughout the year, the Receptions Team also assists with the coffee hour snacks on an as-needed basis.

The Receptions Team is a great place to meet other people while helping to provide goodies and snacks. We cannot anticipate the needs and dates of the Memorial Receptions, so when the need arises, we reach out to the committee members to check availability. The time commitment for the event is based on how much time the member has to give, whether it is for set-up, help during the reception, or breakdown. We also welcome food contributions, even if the member is not available to help work on the event itself.

We would be happy to have more people willing to be Lead Coordinators as well as volunteers to assist with receptions, so if you would like to join us in one of these roles, please reach out to Barb Manning or me, Maryann Jablonowski, to learn more about what is involved. We have a good crew of volunteers who all work well together and have fun. In addition, we want to thank all the Reception Team volunteers who helped all year long!

Circle Dinners Report

Conveners: John and Peggy Sherman

Others: Our generous hosts included Dawn and Dick Dana, Cindy and Chris Edwardson, Mary Ann Jablonowski and Reg Foster, Barbara and Chuck Manning, Alexis Sanborn and Chris Whittaker, Reese Satin, and Stephanie Saunders and Kevin Yeh.

Purpose: Circle Dinners are a great opportunity to socialize and get better acquainted with small groups of fellow members and friends. As well as giving members the opportunity to strengthen their connections with Albany UU and contribute to a vital, nurturing religious community, the dinners provide an extraordinary opportunity for newcomers to feel welcome at Albany UU. Developing personal connections between Albany UUs and newcomers' makes our church community strong.

Accomplishments: Regular dinners were held in members' homes, and to date, 47 people participated in one or more of the dinners.

Challenges: After ten years of coordinating, we will be looking for new leaders to take on this role. The Circle Dinner coordinators assign everyone who signs up for a specific date to a host, and the host coordinates guest contributions to the evening's menu.

Plans for next year: We look forward to more convivial gatherings and more dinners that welcome children.

Projects and Quilts (Ps & Qs) Report

Members: Joan Ekengren, Virginia Hammer, Abby Sugarman, Nancy Wagner, Annika Pfluger, Jay Englishbee, Betsy Wright, Leah Purcell, Amy Lent, Valerie Gasco, Barb Manning and assorted visitors.

We meet every Wednesday from 10 am until 12:30pm in Room B-8. Many members bring individual knitting or other hand-work projects. While we work, we share stories and solve the world's problems. At noon we eat our bag lunches that we each brought, drink tea and eat chocolate. Tea and chocolate are provided by the group.

We welcome any other new members and, if you like to sew, we can teach you how to quilt. If you would like to learn to knit, we can also teach you that. We are offering to teach beginning knitting to anyone who wants to learn. We start with a pair of fingerless mittens, so it is easy and you have something useful when finished. We also welcome crocheters! Contact Barb Manning for further information.

Philosophy Group Report

Reporter: Carol Butt

The philosophy group is a democratically functioning entity that meets each Tuesday morning from 10:15 to 12:00 noon on zoom. It pretty much operates without any one person being the point person. Each week we solicit ideas for the next week in the last 15 minutes and have an

informal vote on the suggestions. The person whose topic we agree upon is the moderator for the next week. The person whose topic is voted on for the following week is encouraged to send the topic to our church administrator for the weekly newsletter.

Walker Book Group Report

Reporter: Martha Musser

The Walker Book Group meets monthly to discuss a book selected by participants. The group is open to all Albany UU members and friends. Newcomers are always welcome. This informal book group has existed for many years and is named in memory of a treasured, deceased Albany UU member. Information about our upcoming meetings can be found on our website, <https://albanyuu.org/walker-book-group/> or in *Windows Weekly*.

In a vote, participants decided on a combination of Zoom and in-person meetings. As planned, in the months of November through March, we met on Zoom at 6:30pm. In the remaining months, we met in person in Channing Hall at 5pm for a potluck supper. The book discussion began at 6:15pm and those not able to meet in Channing joined by Zoom. We do not meet in July and August.

Purpose: The group searches for UU truth and meaning by reading and discussing a wide range of literature, both fiction and nonfiction. Many of our selections explore life in other cultures or current issues. Participants expand their reading horizons and develop a deeper sense of community and stronger connections with other Albany UUs. We select books for each month's discussion by voting. Suggested books must have been read recently and be available at low cost and/or be easily available from the public library.

Books discussed from September 2025 through June 2026: From September through April, the group read and discussed four novels, two memoirs, and two nonfiction books. We read the following: *An Unfinished Love Story* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Long Island* by Colm Tóibín, *Revenge of the Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, *Elsewhere: A Memoir* by Richard Russo, *Tell Me Everything* by Elizabeth Strout, *What We Can Know* by Ian McEwan, *Day* by Michael Cunningham, and *Careless People* by Sarah Wynn-Williams. We will read a classic book in May and selections from a book of short stories in June. Neither book has been selected at this time.

Accomplishments: Despite competition from various other activities and busy schedules, the group continues to thrive and generate interest in reading and discussing literary works of fiction and nonfiction.

Plans for next year: The group will continue to search for UU truth and meaning by reading and discussing various books. We hope to welcome new members.

Building Connections Auction 2026

Reporter: Martha Musser

The auction is our biggest fundraiser of the year! Not only is the auction an essential fundraiser, but it is also an important way to build community. The social events, dinners, garden walks,

hikes, etc., give Albany UU members a chance to socialize and get to know each other better. Services and food items give busy families the opportunity to buy an item that will save valuable time. There are always a variety of interesting and affordable items available, so everyone can participate.

Before the pandemic, Albany UU held an in-person auction during which members and friends could bid on donated items. Since 2022, we have conducted our auction online, using 32auctions.com. All items are fixed prices. As the dangers of the pandemic have eased, we have continued the online auction. Many people prefer the convenience and flexibility of the on-line auction.

Purpose: The auction raises funds to meet Albany UU's expenses and provides opportunities for members and friends to interact, have fun, and know each other better.

Accomplishments: Members and friends donated and bought generously in 2025; 96 items were donated and \$20,000 was raised. By the end of the donation period in 2026, we expect to have about 95 donations. We have the potential to raise \$18,000 by the end of the auction-buying period.

Plans for next year: We will continue with the online auction using 32auctions.com. We hope each year to increase the number of donations and the funds raised.

Holiday Bazaar, December 2025

Planning Team: Anny Lapinski, Barb Manning, Sigrin Newell, Randy Rosette, Sandy Stone

Participants: Barb Manning and Sandy Stone chaired the Pies, Randy Rosette chaired the Soups and Fudge, Sigrin Newell, and Anny Lapinski chaired the crafts. Karen Kaufman recruited the AUU vendors. We will definitely need more leaders to join us next year.

About twenty Albany UU members worked on baking pies, making soups, and creating crafts. Several of them worked on more than one part of the Bazaar. Kudos for their extra effort.

Purpose: Provide a fun activity to honor the winter holidays and raise funds for Albany UU while sharing the products of our creativity and cooking skills.

Accomplishments: The 2025 Bazaar and Craft Fair was held on tables in Channing Hall. The 2025 grand total was **\$4844** compared with the Holiday Bazaar profit in 2024, \$4608. The Soups and Fudge team made a record \$2475.

Crafts: Many people helped with the crafts project. Crafters made items such as hats and scarves, catnip mice, jewelry, holiday decorations, applesauce, jams, and other gift items. All crafters contributed their materials. Things that didn't sell were returned to their makers or donated to Grassroots Givers. Crafters were Ann Marie Haber, Virginia Hammer, Tanya Hotalen, Anny Lapinski, Ireta London, Liza McKinley, Sigrin Newell, Laura Paris, Reese Satin, and Abby Sugarman.

For the **Tiny Treasures** table people were asked to contribute small items for "name your own price" sale. It brought in \$154, not a lot, but it added to the excitement of the sale. Also, it was a

good place for children to get gifts for friends and family. This aspect should be publicized better next year.

Vendors: Four vendors had tables with a larger number of items and items of greater value. They contributed 15% of their profits to the bazaar. Vendors were Heidi Film, Jeffrey Sedam, Jay Sedam, and Sandy Stone

Soups: With Randy Rosette's capable guidance, fourteen contributors made a wide variety of soups, chili, and hot fudge with the goal of meeting all kinds of dietary needs well as favorite tastes. Cooks contributed to the cost of the ingredients and supplies. Soups, in quart and pint containers, were sold for two Sundays. Randy provided recipes for each kind of soup. After the sale, empty containers were returned to Randy for recycling. Soup makers were Sharon Babala, Pat Bailey, Debbie Brown, Dawn Dana, Cindy Dean, Carole Dorfman, Robbin Dzembo-Newton, Kathy Harris, Barb Manning, Donna Meixner, Barb Metz, Paula Moskowitz, Randy Rosette, and Deborah Vogel.

Pies: Pie sales this year totaled \$1,209. Pie crusts were made ahead of time by Sharon Babala, Mary Fellows, Cindee Herrick, Maryann Jablonowski, Barb Manning, Sandy Stone. On Election Day, workers peeled, cored and cut up 3 bushels of apples: Carol Butt, Sharon Babala, Laura Churchill, Dawn Dana, Paula Moskowitz, Chuck Manning, Sigrin Newell, Robbin Dzembo-Newton, Darnell Rohrbaugh, Barb Spink, Deborah Vogel, and Trish Zima.

Sandy Stone and Barb Manning coordinated the assembling of the apple and apple-cranberry pies for a total of 54 pies. Cindee Herrick, Barb Manning and Sandy Stone made the pumpkin pie filling and assembled 30 pumpkin pies.

Barb and Chuck Manning donated applesauce made from the cores. This was sold during the Craft Fair for \$5 per pint or \$9.00 for 2 pints. Twelve pints jars were donated. The profit from this is included in the Craft Fair income.

Treasurer: Betsey Miller kept her cool as she collected and recorded money from all the happy buyers.

Publicity: Bazaar activities were publicized via email, Windows Weekly and Sunday announcements. At the end of October, we posted messages encouraging people to make crafts. The chairs of each group sent emails to all participants from 2025 encouraging them to donate again in 2026. AUU vendors were encouraged to plan to have a table again in 2026.

The organizing committee is grateful to all who helped make crafts, soups, fudge, or pies, as well as all those who helped in the complicated process of setting up and selling at the Bazaar. This fund-raising activity would not be successful without willing workers.

Plans for next year: We plan to have the craft fair again. Having the sale in Channing is a good community-builder. We need many more volunteers – come join us.

TOTAL SALES

Soups and fudge	\$2475
Pies	\$1209
Crafts, Vendors, Tiny Treasures	<u>\$1160</u>
GRAND TOTAL	\$4844

Wine and Cheese Tasting April 2025

Co-Chairs: John Sherman and Al DeSalvo

Wineaux: Al DeSalvo, Chris and Cindy Edwardson, Betsy Kuzia, Ella McGrail, Alexis Sanborn, Peggy and John Sherman, Nate Shulock, Luis Torres, Rick Whitebread, Chris Whittaker.

Accomplishments: Sixty-eight people attended the very successful 21st Wine and Cheese Tasting on March 21, 2026. Many of this year's Wineaux crew were new and imaginative talent and invigorated our team's efforts both in coming up with a new theme and selecting wines. To honor the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we featured seven delicious drinks: hard cider, wines, and Madeira, each with arguable connections to our nation's historic roots via our immigrant forebears' steadfast fascination with and persistence in obtaining and producing alcoholic refreshment and, in the process, introducing fruits from Europe, overcoming New World pests and climate, adapting to new environments, using the deleterious effects of transatlantic shipping to actually improve the taste of inferior wines, avoiding high tariffs on French wines, and competing with European wineries. Each of these beverages was paired with a select cheese presented by Mary Rizzo from the Cheese Traveler! The event was a lot of fun to organize and attend and raised \$2,017.

Special thanks to the Honest Weight Food Coop for contributing most of the accompaniments.

Plans for next year: We are looking forward to holding the 22nd Wine and Cheese Tasting in 2027.

Caring Network Report

Coordinator: Vacant

The Caring Network (CN) is a group of Albany UU volunteers who provide encouragement and short-term support to fellow UU's and friends of the congregation with phone calls, rides, meals and visits.

We want to specifically honor and thank Toni Daniel, who led this team for years with grace, kindness and perseverance. Toni, we appreciate all your work helping us take care of each other.

Currently we are in the process of rethinking the responsibilities of leadership of Caring Network and hope to have a 3 member team who will review requests and help organize two events a year

to reach out to our members who are homebound or have had an event in their lives during the last year where an act of remembering would be helpful. Interested?

Membership in the CN is open to all Albany UU members who are active. Members of the Pastoral Care Associates team are also members of the CN so that they may determine any needs for pastoral care.

Requests for assistance are generally relayed from the church office to the CN coordinator who passes them along to the group.

Pastoral Care Associates relay the previously submitted and reviewed Joys & Sorrows to the CN Network via email. Lois Bailey wrote cards to congregants on a weekly basis. Many, many thanks to Lois for this kind service and for reaching out on behalf of the CN. This task is now in the capable hands of Hannah Milkins, thanks for keeping in touch with our friends in need.

In addition to providing meals and transportation for Albany UU's and friends, Sandy Stone organized a group of amazing volunteers to put together holiday gift bags that were delivered by our friendly crew bringing some holiday spirit and well wishes to 37 people.

The Caring Network is grateful for the opportunity to be of service to the congregation.

Pastoral Care Associates Report

Group: Pastoral Care Associates

Contact Person: Randy Rosette

Members: Sharon Babala, Jim Chicoine, Frank Traynor, Ruth Samuels and Debbie Rodriguez

Purpose: The Pastoral Care Associate team offers supportive listening to members and friends of Albany UU.

Accomplishments:

- We continued with our outreach and listening with many of the Albany UU community.
- Individual PCAs routinely met with Rev Ann to provide insight and updates to their interactions with the congregation.
- We updated our training and we welcomed and trained two new members, Frank Traynor and Ruth Samuels.
- Made several changes to the Joys/Sorrows component of the Sunday Service, including bringing stones to individuals in the audience.

Goals:

- Evaluating and possibly developing compassionate outreach training for interested members of the congregation.

Grief Group Report

Facilitator: Ann Lapinski

Purpose: To provide support and connection for those experiencing grief

Accomplishments: We continue to meet regularly twice a month and have had one new person join our group. All members share and support each other,

Changes: We have established our meetings on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 6 PM.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Racial Healing Group Report

Members

Ireta London- Interim Coordinator

Léa Nokali Ryman

Jaye Holly

Louis Torres

Ireta London

Nellson Moore

Pascelle Saint Laurent

Introduction

The BIPOC Team within our religious organization has been instrumental in fostering inclusive and equitable environments. Our mission is to ensure that all members feel valued and respected, recognizing the unique experiences and perspectives of BIPOC individuals.

Mission Statement

Our mission focused on community outreach, cultural engagement, and hands-on activities that support organizations promoting and creating welcoming inclusive spaces where BIPOC individuals feel safe.

Leadership Transition

This year, Michael Hornsby stepped down from his position as team coordinator. During this transition period, Ireta London is currently serving as the interim coordinator.

Meetings

The BIPOC Team met once a month at Albany UU or on Zoom to discuss initiatives, plan events, and address concerns related to our mission.

Activities and Achievements

- **Community Outreach:** Organized food drives, educational workshops, and health fairs. Collaborated with local organizations to provide resources and support to BIPOC individuals.
- **Cultural Engagement:** Hosted cultural events celebrating diverse backgrounds, including music, dance, and art exhibitions. Conducted seminars on cultural heritage and its impact on faith and community.
- **Hands-On Activities:** Participated in volunteer activities supporting organizations that promote inclusivity and safety for BIPOC individuals. Engaged in community service projects such as neighborhood clean-ups and mentoring programs for youth.

Collaborations

- **Free Food Fridge Albany:** Provides fresh foods, fruits, produce, low-intervention foods, and ready-to-eat meals to food-insecure neighborhoods and marginalized communities.
- **Youth FX:** Works with young people of color in Albany, NY, providing training in digital media technology and enabling them to create documentary and short fiction films.
- **Church of Bethsaida:** Focuses on religion-related, spiritual development causes, specifically Protestant. Contributions to this organization are tax-deductible.
- **Letters Against Isolation (LAI):** Fights senior loneliness through handwritten messages of love, hope, and joy, improving seniors' mental and physical health.
- **Albany UU Juneteenth Celebration:** Education information and red commemorative freedom bracelets.

Leadership and Decision-Making

By actively including BIPOC individuals in leadership, ministry, and decision-making, we strive to address historical injustices and promote racial reconciliation. 2

Financials

The financial health of the BIPOC Team is crucial for sustaining our activities and initiatives. Here is a summary of our financials for the year:

- **Expenses:** Major expenses included costs for organizing events and community outreach.
- **Budget Allocation:** Funds (\$275.00) were allocated to various initiatives such as community outreach, cultural engagement, and hands-on activities.

Future Goals

- Expand outreach programs to reach more BIPOC communities.
- Increase collaboration with other organizations to amplify our impact.
- Develop new initiatives focused on mental health and wellness for BIPOC individuals.
- Strengthen our commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members.

Men's Group Report

Reporter: Chuck Manning

Monday Men's Group: This group started has four members. We have meetings about twice a month, but they are not always on Monday. The current group is Chuck Manning, Phil Rich, Fred Barker, and Jerry Deighan. We have all our meetings on zoom because Phil has moved to Glens Falls. At our meetings we provide mutual support and share the opportunities and challenges we are facing.

OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION

Church Administrator's Report

Staff list:

- **Minister:** Rev. Ann Kadlecek
- **Director of Programs for Children and Youth:** Elizabeth Baldes
- **Director of Music Ministry:** Olga Martinez
- **Church Administrator:** Sophia Garder
- **Congregational Life Coordinator:** Nicholee Froese
- **Tech Support Staff:** Michael Washington
- **Sexton:** Erik vonHausen
- **PCY Program Assistant:** Paula Brewer
- **PCY Lead Youth Group Advisor:** Adrian Cattell
- **Building Hosts, Dishwashers, and Multi-Media Technicians:** Ilene Kane, Erik vonHausen, Chris Jensen, Kate Pierce-Nimz, Molly Daniels, Chris Whittaker, Cassandra Pietrocari, Jimmy Taylor, Rachel Reilly, Amy Lent, Debbie Brown, Fred Eames, Chuck Manning

This past year has been one of growth, stabilization, and continued learning in my role as Administrator. Having entered the position not long before my previous report, I am grateful that this year has allowed me to settle more fully into the work, develop systems, and contribute more strategically to the life of the congregation.

Over the course of the year, I focused on strengthening administrative infrastructure and improving day-to-day operations. One significant accomplishment was upgrading our building security system through the implementation of new key fobs, improving both access control and overall safety. I also transitioned our payroll system from a twice-monthly schedule to a bi-weekly one, creating greater consistency and alignment with standard payroll practices.

One area of ongoing focus is the development of procedural manuals for administrative tasks. This is still very much a work in progress, but it is starting to help document essential processes, increase continuity, and support long-term sustainability in the office. In addition, with the assistance of the Facilities Management Team, I completed a renovation of the administrative office, creating a more functional and welcoming workspace.

I also updated and streamlined several outward-facing processes. This included creating new rental documents and continuing to refine our rental procedures to improve clarity and efficiency for both staff and building users. Alongside this, I have worked to shift more of our workflows into digital formats, reducing reliance on paper and improving organization and accessibility.

Communication has been another area of improvement. I revamped the weekly newsletter to enhance its visual appeal and make content clearer and more engaging for readers. This has helped strengthen how we share information within the congregation.

What I've especially appreciated this year is the people I get to work with. I've truly enjoyed being part of this team and collaborating with colleagues who care deeply about this community. It has been a pleasure to work alongside Elizabeth, Olga, and Nicholee—all of whom challenge and support me in ways that help me grow. I also appreciate Paula and Cathy, whose roles I intersect with less frequently, but whose kindness and care contribute meaningfully to the spirit of the team. I'm especially grateful for the guidance of Rev. Ann, whose support and perspective have been invaluable to my development in this role. I've also valued supervising Erik, our Sexton, and look forward to supporting his expanded presence in the building in the coming year. I'm looking forward to supervising and working with Michael, our new Tech Support staff member, as he settles into the role.

I've also felt fortunate to work closely with many others across the congregation. Collaborating with Jan, President of the Board of Trustees, and Maria, our Treasurer, has been especially valuable, and I appreciate their partnership and dedication. I've also benefited from working with the Ministries and Operations Team and the Facilities Management Team, whose thoughtful engagement and behind-the-scenes efforts help keep so much of our work moving forward. These collaborations have strengthened both my work and my connection to the broader life of the congregation.

Looking ahead, my goals for next year include continuing to build on this foundation. Key priorities include digitizing the church lobby calendar to improve scheduling and accessibility, upgrading the upstairs internet to strengthen connectivity, further refining/improving rental processes, and continuing the development of procedural manuals.

It is a joy and privilege to serve in this role. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with such a dedicated team and to support the mission and life of this congregation. I look forward to another year of growth and service.

Respectfully submitted,
Sophia Garder

Facilities Management Team Report

Chair: Albert De Salvo

The past church year has been a busy one for the Facilities Management Team (formerly Buildings & Grounds). Over the past two and a half years, we have been playing “catch up” tackling both large and small deferred maintenance items. We have made steady progress thanks to the dedicated group of volunteers who constitute the Facilities Management Team.

This past year we have tackled some major projects:

- Installation of a new bay window in Channing Hall.
- Rebuilding of the West Street unused stairwell cap to the basement to prevent sidewalk icing.
- Repair of the steps at 405 Washington Avenue entrance/handicap ramp landing/Sanctuary landing and threshold.
- Analysis of Channing basement/drainage issues.
- Kitchen remodeling.
- Reorganization of the workroom.
- Installation of new large screen and sound system for Community Hall.

In addition to these projects, the team has performed innumerable day-to-day tasks. These tasks included items that members of the Facilities Management Team, staff, Ministerial Operations Team, and in some cases, congregants, have identified.

For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, **major projects** will include:

- Replacing boilers that serve Community Hall.
- Analyze and possibly implement a wireless smoke/fire alarm system for the admin/pcy and Channing Hall buildings.
- Replace Carrier A/C rooftop pilot control system.
- Clean dirt and pollution from Community Hall exterior louvers and windows.
- Explore potential for replacing the handicapped lift in Community Hall with a ramp.
- Build risers in the choir area for better spacing of choir.
- Install heat wire to prevent ice chunks from forming on West Street.
- Secure classroom doors for safety (part of this is completed with window shade installation).
- Retain a brick restoration contractor or architect to determine where repointing and brick repair is needed.

Submitted by Albert De Salvo, Chair, Facilities Management

Art & Aesthetics Team Report

Chair: Dick Dana

Members: Paula Brewer, Ilene Kane, Peter Meixner, Caroyne Stetson, Vida Wehren, Brad Workman

Accomplishments:

The Team continues its work, as stated in our charge, to “make our spaces more attractive and welcoming.” Though several of the goals we set last year are still ongoing, such as revamping the front hall lobby and completing research into all the congregation’s art collection, a number of projects have been completed, or will be completed by the time you read this.

1. The temporary outdoor art installation of Rowan Pigott is set to be up on the columns before the end of April 2026, thanks to a generous grant from the Endowment Trust.
2. Four new wall wash lights have been installed in the hall down to Community Hall. The six Keith Haring prints from his series “Dancer” that were purchased and hung this year, now stand out clearly to passersby.
3. Several additional new artworks have been acquired and are on display, some through donations
 - four works by deceased member Marge Foster donated by her two daughters;
 - six works by Native American artists: 5 prints, an Abenaki mask, and an original birch bark bittenwork, variously donated by Ireta London, Vida Wehren and Dick Dana;
 - two felt banners created and donated by Dave Street for the satellite Two Rivers Congregation whose launch was unsuccessful

and some purchased works

- three framed prints of Gee’s Bend quilts and
 - a framed print of one of Amy Sherald’s striking portraits.
4. The somewhat dilapidated benches dedicated to Abby and Paul Jones, formerly outside our sanctuary, were repainted. Pillows created by Albany UU children now grace the benches, now located beneath new art in the lobby directly outside Community Hall, creating a space for rest and reflection.
 5. New plants in new pots now grace our beacon window in Community Hall.
 6. Picture hanging rails, made of maple to match the trim, were installed in the lobby directly outside Community Hall, for ease in hanging art.
 7. At the request of our minister, a photo gallery of current staff was created and has been updated regularly as staff changes occur.
 8. Our Charles Joy library now has a photo of Charles Joy, with accompanying description of this fascinating former member of our congregation. It was his inspiration that resulted in the flaming chalice becoming the symbol of Unitarian Universalism.
 9. Two historical art objects have been rescued from the back of a storage closet. An elaborately painted 4-foot by 8-foot fundraising board from the 1950s is now hung in the back Community Hall staircase, along with a sign on metal by Dan Sekellick, which was hung outside our entrance to celebrate our Sesquicentennial year (1992) as a congregation. In addition, the two banners on felt by Dave Street are also hung in the staircase.
 10. The hallway beneath Community Hall has been rearranged and moveable partitions put in place to permanently hide from view the items stored in the hallway.
 11. The Art & Aesthetics Team has been consulted on a number of projects, including the installation of two LED screens in Community Hall, one yet to be installed, and the acoustic panels being installed in Community Hall.

Our most ambitious effort this year, spearheaded by Vida Wehren and Ilene Kane, with technical assistance from Nicholee Froese and Bob Franklin, was the Native American Art exhibit. “Footprints In the Homelands: Celebrating the Cultures of the First Peoples” took major effort, plus funding from the Endowment Trust, to pull off. For the opening celebration, a musician and storyteller from the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohican Indians, Shawn Stevens, came from Wisconsin to participate. Musician and Native American art lover Steve Mole came from Massachusetts to perform a song he wrote in honor of a painting by the Mohican artist Rebeca Burr entitled “The Lost Children of Ukraine: The Next 7 Generations.” Approximately 55 people attended the opening on a Sunday afternoon.

Though Ilene Kane, Vida Wehren, Amy Lent, and Dick Dana put much effort into making our contributions to Albany’s First Friday successful, the Congregational Life Team has decided that we back off from that commitment to devote our resources to more productive efforts. However, art wall coordinator Ilene Kane continues to mount an exhibit on our art wall every month of the church year.

Goals for next year include:

1. Continuing to inventory, document, and repair as needed Albany UU’s art collection;
2. Continuing to upgrade the art on the walls of our facility to be more welcoming;
3. Commissioning a mural to be painted in the first-floor family bathroom, currently one of the least welcoming spaces in our facility;
4. Creating an exhibit of art by local Native American tribes (Mohican, Schaghticoke);
5. Re-upholstering or replacing four chairs in Channing Hall, which were last upholstered approximately 25 years ago and are now threadbare.
6. Locate an additional banner to be put into the rotation of banners hung behind the pulpit, since one of the four existing banners is beginning to fall apart.

Gardening Team Report

Coordinator: Jonathan Bick

Members: About 20 dedicated volunteers who volunteer once or multiple times over the growing season.

Purpose: The Gardening Team tends the gardens surrounding our buildings and maintains the welcoming appearance of Albany UU. This provides a benefit for our members as well as our neighbors. We offer a combination of "one shot" and ongoing seasonal volunteer opportunities, allowing all experience levels to participate and work alongside other members and friends.

Accomplishments: The Gardening Team met six times in the past year for gardening, including mulching the beds in June 2025. This resulted in dozens of bags of yard waste and many bags of garbage removed from the beds. The team also trimmed the hedges in front of the Sanctuary several times and planted donated myrtle in the terrace garden on Washington Avenue.

Challenges: The team could not successfully coordinate with other teams to secure funding for replacement of the decaying, uneven and sunken bricks next to the building with stamped concrete by the Washington Avenue ramp.

Plans for next year: The Gardening Team plans to continue the upkeep of the garden beds, mulching and opening to new volunteers. The team will also work with other teams to find solutions for the decaying paving bricks.

Flower Committee Report

Chair: Cindee Herrick

Members: Sandy Stone, Deborah Vogel, Barbara Manning, Barbara Metz, Debbie Brown, Alexis Agliano Sanborn

Purpose: To provide flowers for Sunday services, memorial services, and memorial receptions throughout the church year.

Accomplishments: The small team met its goals including decorating the Sanctuary for Christmas Eve service. Experienced team members make the work enjoyable and productive. Additional participants would make it even better.

History and Archives Report

Chair: Patricia Bailey

Goals: Continuing to keep the archives in good order, to preserve our history and to make records accessible to all FUUSA members as well as with organizing, systematizing and updating the archives as needed. We continue to work on adding new items donated by members while striving to maintain only one copy of most materials. We have an alpha list of files along with a list of the location of items of interest and value.

Responsibilities: Maintaining the History & Archives of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany. The archives contain many records going back to the beginning of the Universalist Society in 1830's and continuing with the First Unitarian Church in 1940's to date. Some of these records are irreplaceable. The Archives also contain many items saved by members and later turned over to us for preservation. The originals of some of our records are stored in the New York State Library and the Trustees also keep microfilms in Stone Mountain Storage Inc. - as per Board approval. Copies of most of these documents are kept in the archives. Also, due to space we are only able to archive one of every valuable item, such as duplicates of Board meeting minutes or Building committee minutes, etc. It is our hope that we will be able to continue to store important records along with much interesting data in this manner and for long into the future

Plans for next year: Continuing in 2027 we hope to as much as possible maintain the files for easier access to many documents and FUUSA related items. We gratefully accept archival items for safekeeping including photos and we especially appreciate having dates, including the year and names (especially in photographs) of each item & photo and, if appropriate, the name of the person donating the items. We now protect valuable books with archival papers for better, safer storage. Access to the Archives remains a concern as the stairs are awkward and often blocked by numerous items (cleaning supplies, tools, etc.) A different area, in another part of the church,

would be appreciated and would allow for better use and easier access. The current area is unheated and not cooled in the summer.

Thank you to those who continue to help preserve our story.

Joy Library Report

Chair: Kelli Smith

Members: Melanie Axel-Lute, Linda Way, Kathy Harris, Cassie Artale (ex-officio)

Purpose: The Joy Library supports the mission of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany by selectively collecting and facilitating access to resources for adults that are in keeping with Albany Unitarian Universalist Society (AUU)'s mission and with the Unitarian Universalist Principles. The Library's first priority is to collect resources on the UU faith tradition and its current developments. Beyond Unitarian Universalism, the Library's collection will emphasize world religions, especially liberal theology and spirituality, and ethical and social justice issues. While UU and UU history is valued, Joy Library's collection supports exploration more than research. Members and friends are eligible to borrow books; guests and newcomers will be accommodated on an individual basis.

Accomplishments: The deep weeding has been completed resulting in a more focused and organized catalog. This has also created more room for face-out displays which continue to be changed regularly. A new display has been added representing monthly heritage & awareness themes with books selected from the library collection. Checkouts have remained steady. We purchased 4 new titles this year and reviewed donations from members of the congregation.

Kelli Smith took over as chair in November.

We continue to provide encouragement and offer assistance for the youth book project, currently in the hands of our busy Children, Youth and Families colleagues.

Incidental work accomplished includes responding to member questions, fielding regular donations, cataloging new additions, and withdrawing from the catalog weeded items.

Respectfully submitted, Kelli Smith

Website Team Report

Members: Nicholee Froese and David Musser

Purpose: The Website Team is responsible for maintaining and improving Albany UU's online presence, ensuring that our website reflects who we are as a congregation and serves as a clear, welcoming, and useful resource for both newcomers and current members.

Accomplishments: This year, the Website Team undertook a comprehensive review of Albany UU's existing website. Through this process, we identified several key challenges, including outdated content, technical issues, redundancy, and a structure that made it difficult for users to easily find the information they need. We also recognized that the overall look and feel of the site no longer reflects the vibrancy and warmth of our congregation.

In response, we engaged in a deep exploration of what a renewed website could and should be—focusing on clarity, accessibility, visual appeal, and alignment with Albany UU’s identity and values. This included researching best practices, reviewing other congregational websites, and identifying design elements and features that would better support both newcomers and active participants in congregational life.

At the same time, we conducted a thorough search for a web designer who could partner with us in bringing this vision to life. We are pleased to be working with **Jason Cavett of Cavettek**, who brings both technical expertise and a collaborative approach to the redesign process.

David Musser led the development of a detailed proposal to the Endowment Trust to fund a full website redesign. This proposal included not only the technical and design needs of the project, but also a clear plan for how staff and volunteers would collaborate during the build process.

We worked closely with the Ministry Operations Team (MOT) to ensure that the necessary staff and volunteer capacity would be in place to support the project. This collaborative planning was essential in preparing for a successful redesign process.

We are pleased to report that the proposal was approved by the Endowment Trust. Following this approval, we held a “soft kickoff” meeting last week and are preparing for the formal launch of the redesign project in early June.

Plans for Next Year: The primary focus for the coming year will be the successful redesign and launch of the Albany UU website. The build phase is expected to take approximately three months.

Nicholee Froese will serve as Content and Design Coordinator for the project, working closely with Jason Cavett, staff, and volunteer leaders. A key component of this work will be gathering, organizing, and refining content from across the congregation to ensure the new site is clear, cohesive, and representative of Albany UU’s many programs and ministries.

This process will rely on collaboration with volunteer leaders and teams throughout the congregation, who will help provide updated content and ensure accuracy and completeness.

In addition, we plan to grow the Website Team by engaging additional volunteers to support ongoing website maintenance, content updates, and future improvements. Expanding the team will help ensure that the website remains current, relevant, and responsive to the evolving needs of the congregation.

The goal of this work is to create a website that is welcoming to newcomers, easy to navigate, visually engaging, and reflective of the vibrant and inclusive community that is Albany UU.