



# Countryside Church

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

• *Create Belonging* • *Inspire Curiosity* • *Heal our World*

## 2024-25 Year in Review Annual Reports – Programs



*We unite  
to strengthen the bonds of kinship  
among all persons;  
to promote human dignity; and  
to increase reverence for  
life's creating, sustaining, and  
transforming power through  
worship, study, and service.*

**Presented prior to & at  
the Annual Meeting  
to be held on May 18, 2025**



# Table of Contents

OUR MISSION, VISION, ASPIRATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP, COVENANT OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIP.....	1
ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA.....	2
PRESIDENT’S REPORT.....	3
2024-25 BOARD OF TRUSTEES .....	4
LEADERSHIP SLATE FOR 2025-26	
BOARD OF TRUSTEES.....	5
ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE.....	5
NOMINATING COMMITTEE.....	6
LEADERS COMPLETING TERMS.....	6
STAFF REPORTS	
MINISTER .....	7
COMMUNITY MINISTER.....	8
CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR.....	9
RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION MANAGER ( <i>SEE CHILDREN &amp; YOUTH RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION REPORT</i> ) ....	16
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC.....	10
THE MINISTRIES .....	11
WORSHIP MINISTRY .....	11
<i>CREATE BELONGING</i> : KINSHIP MINISTRY.....	13
YOUNG ADULTS	
SOUL MATTERS SMALL GROUP MINISTRY	
FEMININE DIVINE WOMEN’S GROUP	
TRANSITIONS	
EARTH RHYTHMS DRUM CIRCLE	
MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE	
NEW MEMBERS IN 2024-25 .....	15
<i>INSPIRE CURIOSITY</i> : STUDY MINISTRY .....	16
CHILDREN & YOUTH RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION .....	16
FAITH DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULTS & YOUTH.....	18
ATHEIST, HUMANIST, AGNOSTIC GROUP	
BOOK CIRCLE	
BUDDHIST STUDY GROUP	
FIRST WEDNESDAY BOOK GROUP	
HAIKU GARDEN AND WORKSHOP	
JOURNALING CIRCLE	
LAST MONDAYS BOOK GROUP	
OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION	
READING ROUNDTABLE	
<i>HEAL OUR WORLD</i> : SERVICE MINISTRY.....	21
GREEN SANCTUARY COMMITTEE	
JUSTICE MATTERS COMMITTEE	
LAY & CARE MINISTRY PROGRAMS	
OUTREACH STEERING COMMITTEE (OSC)	
CHALICE HOUSE	
OPERATIONS/FOUNDATIONS MINISTRY.....	26
BUILDING & FACILITIES	
GROUNDS WORKING GROUP	
AUDIO-VISUAL	
MARKETING TEAM	
PERSONNEL COMMITTEE	

## **Our Mission**

**In pursuit of Beloved Community, we welcome ALL to  
Create Belonging,  
Inspire Curiosity,  
Heal our World.**

## **Our Vision**

We envision a Beloved Community that is a dynamic community, ever widening the circle to be inclusive of everyone and where diversity can flourish. We envision and realize an interdependent relationship of love and mutual respect for each other and our environment, and a place where we can also learn from each other while we honor an all-encompassing free and responsible search for meaning and truth in this world.

*To serve our mission and make real our vision, we engage with one another and with this congregation in the light of these*

### ***Aspirations of Membership:***

To the extent that my life circumstances permit, as a member of Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist I will:

- Attend Sunday services and congregational meetings
- Seek out and share opportunities for spiritual, ethical, and meaningful growth
- Engage in congregational projects, programs, or events that reach beyond the church
- Engage in congregational projects, programs, or events that support the life of the church
- Strive to give 3 - 5% of my income to support the mission of the church
- Share with others outside the church the value of my membership at Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist

### ***Covenant of Right Relationship***

In my relationship with the CCUU community and in keeping with our UU values, I will strive to:

- Take responsibility for my words and actions by being honest and respectful in my speech, while listening to others with an open mind and heart;
- Be sensitive to possible conflicts, and be willing to work toward solutions using available resources, accepting that some differences may not be resolvable;
- Respect and support the diversity within our congregation, and work to create and maintain a safe and welcoming environment for all.



# ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA

1. Opening Reading
2. CCUU Covenant of Right Relationship
3. Administration: Lisa Gilley
  - a. Establish Voting Eligibility: *the right to vote is limited to those who have been members for 31 days and have paid a pledge or received an exemption*
  - b. Establish a Quorum – 20% of voting members
  - c. Overview of voting process
    - i. If in person, raise hand
    - ii. If online, be sure your camera is on, raise your hand, & a Board member will be counting on-screen votes.
    - iii. If you are only able to join by phone, email your vote to Pay-Wydell@gmail.com
4. Minister's Address: Rev. Pam
5. President's Remarks: Lisa Gilley
6. Committee Reports
  - a. Endowment Committee
  - b. Chalice House
  - c. Outreach Steering Council
7. Presentation of 2025-26 Leadership Slate & Voting: Margaret Myren
  - a. Board of Trustees
  - b. Endowment Committee
  - c. Nominating Committee
8. Operating Budget Presentation: Debbie Lee, Treasurer
  - a. 2024-25 Overview
  - b. 2025-26 Proposed Budget & Voting
10. Recognition of Outgoing Leadership
11. Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice
12. Adjourn

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends and members of Countryside Church –

It's been a rather unsettling year in our country. This has made me even more grateful for the familiarity, strength, and solace of our community at Countryside Church. Each Sunday, I find renewed joy in familiar faces, in visitors sharing their stories, and in the peaceful, grounding presence Reverend Pam brings to worship. I appreciate the calm and reverence we create together - through music and shared reflections - which allows us all to restore our energy and return to the world renewed, ready to do good and be champions of justice and compassion.

Here at CCUU, we've also faced change and uncertainty. In spring 2024, we were unable to call a settled minister, and instead entered our first-ever year of contract ministry. Later, our Interim Religious Exploration Manager resigned unexpectedly in the fall. Both events required quick adaptation and creative solutions.

Despite the unexpected turn of events, I'm grateful for how well things turned out.

### Our New Ministry

This first year with Reverend Pam has felt different than I'd anticipated. I had worried that contract ministry might feel more transactional - less rooted in long-term commitment. But my experience has been quite the opposite.

Throughout the year, the Board has experienced a strong sense of partnership and shared commitment with Reverend Pam—and with Reverend Karen as well.

Even before joining us, as we finalized her contract, Reverend Pam asked that her salary be reduced by \$3,000 so those funds could support a new worship service aimed at reaching new people.

When our Religious Exploration Manager stepped down, Reverend Karen graciously stepped in to help. Ultimately, she agreed to lead the program for the full church year—at the same hourly rate we had previously paid someone with far less experience. Her contributions have been a gift.

Later in the year, as healthcare costs rose, both Reverend Pam and Reverend Karen voluntarily switched to lower-cost insurance plans, despite our Board's willingness to cover the added expense. Their generosity and commitment have been remarkable.

And so, with their generosity and commitment, I feel confident and excited about our upcoming year of CoMinistry with Reverend Pam and Reverend Karen. It is another first for us - new territory and a new way to be together.

Thanks to their support and care, I feel excited and confident as we prepare to begin our first year of CoMinistry. This is another first for CCUU - new territory and a new way to be together.

### Board Focus

In addition to our ongoing attention to congregational health, growth, and financial stability, the Board focused this year on three specific goals:

- Reimagining church to enhance relevance and reach
- Organizing our social justice work more effectively
- Caring for our land and redesigning our landscaping to be more sustainable and less labor-intensive

Reimagining of church is happening! Reverend Pam has introduced two new worship formats at CCUU. 'Soul Restoration' is a midweek gathering with informal worship and a potluck meal. A new Sunday evening service will begin in June. These alternatives respond to changing cultural norms around Sunday morning churchgoing - we hope that these gatherings will provide new opportunities for folks who might not be drawn to our more traditional Sunday worship. Sharing joys and concerns in our Sunday service has strengthened our sense of connection, and Reverend Pam's spiritual leadership brings peace and inspiration to our Sunday mornings.

Our work around social justice took a big leap forward with the formation of a new task force in January. That team help create the overarching Justice Matters Committee, which now coordinates efforts in four key areas: Climate, LGBTQ rights, Immigration, and Democracy. It's been great to see so many folks show up at rallies to support protection of our civil liberties, our environment and our constitution. And on June 1, we'll take a meaningful step by replacing our regular Sunday service with a Day of Service, to allow our entire congregation to participate in the Buffalo Grove Pride Parade and other hands-on justice work.

As for our grounds, work is underway to replant some areas in front of the church with a native plant design. These native plants can thrive, despite the effects of climate change. This change will reduce weeding while providing ecosystem services, such as soil conservation, water filtration, and wildlife habitat.

### Congregational Health and Growth

As we experiment with new ways to be at church (like the Pancake Dinner brought to us by Rev. Pam and Rev. Karen), it's been uplifting to see so many new and returning faces on Sunday mornings. Worship attendance is up by 8%, and coffee hours are lively, especially during our monthly potluck lunches. By the end of this church year, we will have welcomed about 20 new members. While our overall membership number has remained fairly constant, we see a lot of engagement of many new visitors, and we look forward to welcoming them as members.

Participation in our Religious Exploration program is less steady than we would hope, but trends are improving. We know the lack of consistent RE leadership in recent years has posed challenges. Reverend Karen's leadership is helping us build momentum and we are grateful for her continued support next year. Her creativity is behind two new outreach efforts aimed at attracting young families to visit us on Sunday mornings: hiring a Sunday nursery caregiver and installing creative banners facing Hamilton Park.

My sense is that the spirit of our congregation is strong. So many people have stopped to tell me how much they have enjoyed a sermon and how much they appreciate Reverend Pam. There is a sense of calm in our time together and energy in our work together.



## Financials

We faced sharp increases in our building and healthcare insurance costs—beyond even our forecasts. Thanks to diligent research by staff and lay leaders, we've secured alternate providers and anticipate saving up to \$15,000 in the coming year.

Our pledge drive was especially heartening. With your generosity, pledges increased by \$40,000—an average increase of over 8%. Our 'Mind the Gap' campaign raised nearly \$21,000 to help with unexpected insurance costs. Your generosity is inspiring, and we are so grateful for your contributions.

## Gratitude

It's always difficult to thank everyone by name—I know I'd miss someone whose steadfast support behind the scenes makes this place run. But I want to express heartfelt thanks to our amazing staff:

- Alison Vernon, our gifted Music Director, brings not only musical excellence but also deep creativity to worship planning. One of my most powerful memories is Alison leading 'I Will Be Your Standing Stone' just when many of us needed reassurance.
- Janice Razaq is a true blessing to us – her music transports us, deepening the meaning and spirit we find here on Sunday mornings. Where else can you hear such a talented pianist each week!
- Luis Diaz keeps our worship accessible and high-quality across Zoom and YouTube. Luis flexibly and efficiently supports our worship team and navigates our last last-minute changes. We are blessed to have his professionalism and skills each Sunday.

- Laurie Lantz continues to bring her unique and invaluable insight to her role as Congregational Administrator. It is, perhaps, Laurie who shoulders the biggest burden when there are changes in ministers and staff at CCUU. Laurie's knowledge and expertise have enabled us to continue to operate smoothly during the many recent transitions. My deep thanks to Laurie for her countless good suggestions, thoughtful attention to detail, her organization and analysis of critical data. I am so grateful for Laurie's steady presence as she provides not only support but leadership at CCUU. I don't know how I could have done my job without her.

Finally, my deep thanks to Reverend Pam and Reverend Karen. Their creative solutions bolstered us when we faced unexpected challenges, and their generosity of spirit helped us through every challenge. They have truly ministered to us, and we are fortunate to share the path ahead with them.

As we look to the year ahead, may we continue to nurture each other and live into our mission to

*Create Belonging  
Inspire Curiosity  
Heal our World.*

The world needs our support, our love, and our gifts - now more than ever.

*With heartfelt gratitude  
~ Lisa Gilley*

---

# Current Board of Trustees 2024-25

---



**Lisa Gilley**  
President



**Gary LaBedz**  
President-elect



**Mike Berry**  
Vice President



**Debbie Lee**  
Treasurer



**Pat Wydell**  
Secretary



**Nancy Frenk**  
Trustee



**Jerome McDonnell**  
Trustee



**Ryan Schaeffges**  
Trustee



**Peggy Simonsen**  
Trustee



**Dan Yokas**  
Trustee

# Board of Trustees 2025-26

---

To be Elected:



**Gary LaBedz**

President  
1<sup>st</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Pat Wydell**

Secretary  
1<sup>st</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Rick Rayborn**

Treasurer  
1<sup>st</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Ryan Schaeffes**

Trustee  
2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
2<sup>nd</sup> 2-year term



**Elizabeth Van Orden**

Trustee  
1<sup>st</sup> year of  
2-year term

Continuing:



**Mike Berry**

Vice President  
2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Nancy Frenk**

Trustee  
2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Peggy Simonsen**

Trustee  
2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
2-year term



**Dan Yokas**

Trustee  
2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
2-year term

---

# Endowment Committee, 2025-26

---

To be Elected:



**Margaret Myren**

1<sup>st</sup> year of  
5-year term

Continuing:



**Ed Monson**

5<sup>th</sup> year of  
5-year term



**Bob Anders**

2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
3-year term



**Linda Segall**

2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
4-year term



**Kevin Christensen**

2<sup>nd</sup> year of  
5-year term

# Nominating Committee 25-26

---

## To be Elected:



**Margaret Myren**

1st year of  
2nd 2-yr term



**Hayden Pierce**

1st year of  
2nd 2-yr term



**Joy Simon**

1st year of  
2-yr term

## Continuing:



**Linda Berry**

2nd year of  
2nd 2-year term



**Ellen Vinzani**

2nd year of  
2-year term

---

## Those completing terms:



**Lisa Gilley**  
President



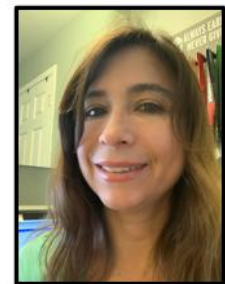
**Debbie Lee**  
Treasurer



**Jerome McDonnell**  
Trustee



**Craig Wydell**  
Endowment  
Committee



**Crystina Smith**  
Nominating  
Committee

***Thank you, all,  
for your Service  
to the congregation!***

## MINISTER



It has been a blessing to walk with this congregation during the 2024-25 church year. While facing challenges in the wider world, Country-side has offered community, creativity, companionship, and lots of spaces to laugh and enjoy the many gifts this generous world offers.

In August, I joined as your contract minister after the disappointment of not secur-

ing a called minister. I encountered concern, anxiety, and disequilibrium but also observed a strong commitment to the values and mission of the congregation.

As the year began, I dedicated time to listening to anyone who wished to meet. By November, I had engaged individually with 88 congregants. It was beneficial to understand your concerns, hopes, and vision for a thriving and dynamic church. Additionally, these conversations provided an opportunity for members to address issues faced during the interim period and to process the disappointment of not yet having a settled minister.

The Religious Exploration department encountered difficulties when Manager Marta Sine Jones had to take medical leave in August. Without a clear plan, I sought advice from the RE Council. Marta went on leave for September but resigned in the third week. With the new RE season approaching, the board hired Rev Karen Mooney as Interim Manager. Karen is my wife and accepted the position to fill a need and support my ministry. I am very grateful for her generosity.

The plan from the previous year was to hold RE classes every other Sunday. This proved confusing and hindered our goal of rebuilding a strong program. With help from Linda Berry, Debbie Lee, and lead teachers, the RE Council devised a new plan to offer weekly activities to improve attendance. This led to an increase from 6-8 kids per week to over 25 on Easter Sunday.

Aware of the congregation's anxiety ahead of November elections, we began Soul Restoration Thursdays on September 26th. Attendance ranged from 6 to 28 people. Each session ended with a potluck in Atherton Hall. After a holiday break, sessions resumed in February with a new format led by church volunteers. It is a popular event offering support and shared meals weekly.

When I was hired by the board, I proposed setting aside a portion of my salary to start a new Sunday evening worship service. After some time, and with Karen's volunteer support, a dedicated group has formed to make this idea happen. *Tending the Spark: An Evening Gathering* will feature drumming, chant, conversation, and food to attract those uninterested in traditional church and provide a worship experience that is both ancient and new. It aims to connect people to their deeper selves and to showcase CCUU's identity. The service starts in June, running on the 2nd & 4th Sundays at 5pm, with evaluation in the fall. Make sure you tell your non-churchy friends.

Each minister brings their own theological perspective. Mine leans towards earth-centered Paganism but acknowledges truths in many major faiths. I have a background in Jesus' teachings, studied with Sufi Murshids, and connect

with Jewish mystical music. We've celebrated more Christian holidays recently and after the Christmas Eve service, someone noted the focus on 'Jesus,' which made me laugh since it was his birthday celebration. I've emphasized shared truths in various faiths, exploring commonalities instead of differences and reclaiming metaphor as a way to interact with life's meanings. Following a Religious Naturalism service, many attendees expressed that they had discovered a new term for their spirituality.

We held a Transgender Day of Remembrance service in November and a RE sponsored Shrove Tuesday pancake dinner for Lent. Over 75 people, including ten children, attended Seder dinner, reviving a long-standing CCUU tradition. A great time was had by all, and plans are already underway for next year.

Despite global instability with the new administration, our worship services and events have seen solid attendance throughout the year. We've been blessed in having only three church related memorials this year. We also had one delightful wedding. Ten new members were welcomed in December and one child dedicated in November. A number of new members are expected to join during the Flower Communion service in June.

I have worked closely with the Lay Ministry team this year. I visit folks who are homebound and offer comfort during tough times. To help with transportation needs that church members might struggle to meet, I bought Lyft gift cards. We hope this will make sure everyone can get where they need to go.

A dedicated group of folks, including Karen as volunteer, has revived the social justice efforts in the church by forming Justice Matters, to replace the mostly defunct Social Justice Council. It organizes attendance at rallies and shares wider actions for justice. The Welcoming Congregation group is planning an all-church event at the Pride Parade in Buffalo Grove on June 1st, and we've canceled in-church service that day. For those not attending the parade, activities will be available in the building. The Time & Talent Auction team raised over \$36,000 with their successful event to support local service partners.

While I have not spent a lot of time connecting with the wider world this year due to the intensity of learning this congregation, I have attended a few local protests and am connected to both UUANI and UUPMI. I am on the Executive Team of the Midwest UUMA chapter and organized our fall retreat at the Loyola Retreat Center in Woodstock. I am also connected with a Fox River Clergy group and volunteer for The Land Conservancy group in McHenry County.

I am grateful for the love and support of my wife this year and excited to begin official CoMinistry with her in the fall. We appreciate recognition of the work we've been doing together and the opportunity to deepen our ministry together.

We each have only one small span of time on this green earth and it goes by very fast. My ministry is characterized by a focus on slowing down, paying attention, prioritizing relationships and remembering that we are all interconnected and entangled in a vast and wondrous mystery called life. I'm glad we were able to spend the past year exploring together and look forward to the opportunity to continue our travels in 2025-26.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam. ~ Pam

## COMMUNITY MINISTER



Community Ministers in the Unitarian Universalist Association are required to be a member of a UU society and to possess a certification in some form of specialized ministry. For a minister of my standing congregational affiliation is not required, but I believe it is wise. I remain grateful to

Countryside Church for being the Affiliated Congregation for my work.

My primary credentials are as a Board Certified Diplomate of the National Guild of Hypnotists and a Board Certified Chaplain. I specialize in working with persons who have life-changing medical problems using an advanced form of medical hypnosis. In the small world of hypnotic practitioners I am well known, and if anyone is interested you will find the details on my web site at [www.CSGiles.org](http://www.CSGiles.org)

I am not paid by our congregation. My practice of medical hypnosis is self-supporting. I maintain free clinics for cancer patients at Wellness House in Hinsdale, Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park and Wellness Beyond Walls (hosted by our congregation). Between these three clinics I help up to 75 cancer patients

each month without charge.

I will have filled our pulpit four times this church year. While my agreement with our congregation specifies only that I may be asked to preach "up to" twice each year, in practice I've done much more when my help has been requested. This year I am also teaching an eight session Adult Education course on the New Testament this year, and so far that's been fun.

I write a quarterly column for the Journal of Hypnotism. My website makes free self-hypnotic recordings, videos and other material available to the public. I am a member of the Advisory Board of the National Guild of Hypnotists and the author of the curriculums it uses to teach medical hypnosis and hypnotic oncology. I also chair the Ethics Committee and oversee professional regulation. This past year I was faculty for two hypnosis conferences, giving a major lecture at the Solid Gold Convention of the National Guild of Hypnotists in Las Vegas.

I would like to express my gratitude to my parish colleague, our Contract Minister, the Rev. Pam Rumancik for her kindness throughout this year. I want to thank you all for your support, and I am happy to be part of Countryside Church.

*Respectfully submitted, The Rev. C. Scot Giles, D.Min.*

## CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR



Last November was the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of my being in my position. My day-to-day work to support the Board, Ministries, Staff & Minister in the coordination and administration of programs is not necessarily worthy of the annual report. My major areas of responsibility are general administration; communications, including e-news and website; finance, including all bookkeeping and payroll; scheduling coordination for church programs & building rentals; maintaining church records, files, & databases; overseeing church facilities.

### **Some Highlights of this church year** *(in addition to our new staff members)*

- **Change of Work Schedule:** I changed my work schedule in January, so that I am working Sunday through Thursday and am off on Friday & Saturday. Working on Sunday allows me to see and meet with people who aren't here during the week and to host the zoom worship service, welcoming any new online attendees and our regular online attendees.
- **Communications:** I continue to create a slide for each Sunday service for posting to the website. I produce the Weekly E-news and Sunday reminders and announcement slides for the narthex on Sundays. I continue to compile worship reach data (in person and online attendance and YouTube views) and email open rates & most clicked links for the Board each month. I have been working with the Branding/Identity team on the website update and to get a marketing/communications team up and going. Church member Elizabeth Van Orden has been a tremendous lead in this effort.
- **Breeze User Video:** After updating several fields in our Breeze church management system (aka database) last year, this year I created a video which demonstrates for members how to use Breeze. *If you are church member who is not familiar with Breeze, let me know. If you are familiar with Breeze, please make sure you log in and update the skills & interests section and your emergency medical contact info.*
- **Policy & Procedures:** We have migrated to Google Workspace for Nonprofits so that our google drive/docs are shared properly; we want to make sure that church documents are owned by the church and not by the person who uploads them. Part of that migration which is still in process is getting group email lists set up.
- I have worked a lot this year on an Office Manual, making sure all my tasks and activities are recorded, to make it easier for my successor (yes, there will come a day when I will no longer be administrator). It also helps those who staff the office when I am on vacation.
- **Copyright Licenses:** We maintain copyright licenses from OneLicense and Christian Copyright Solutions/WorshipCast so that we can include music in the recorded services which we post on our website & YouTube. I continue to report the service music to those copyright services and provide publishing infor-

mation to our tech coordinator to post with recorded services.

### **Professional Development Highlights**

- I maintain membership in the Association of UU Administrators (AUUA). I am also on the Professional Days Planning Team for the AUUA, helping to plan professional development for administrators two times/year.
- I attended AUUA Professional Day in October and will attend another the end of May.
- I will attend UUA General Assembly in Baltimore in June.
- This year, I took a Nonprofit Management course through Meadville Lombard Theological Seminary. It was paid for in part with professional development expenses from the church and in part through a scholarship from the AUUA. I don't know that I learned anything new, but it reinforced what I already know and have been doing, it gave me a renewed perspective, particularly through a racial, equity, and inclusion (REI) lens, and it was helpful to be with other church professionals to discuss the material. The culmination of this certificate program will be a small group project on risk management.

The addition of Rev. Pam and Rev. Karen to our staff team has been a great pleasure. I am tremendously grateful for the continued assistance of Karen Epps and Debbie Lee, reliable and skilled office volunteers. This year, Don Bak has provided *lots* of help with building repairs; many thanks, Don!!

*Respectfully submitted by Laurie Lantz*

## DIRECTOR OF MUSIC



Beginning in July, our summer services are lay led. The CCUU choir does not typically sing during July and August but often our band will play, some individuals will sing solos, our strings may play and of course, Dr Janice Razak and Director of Music Alison Vernon will play and sing as desired. Janice and Alison work in close contact with the lay leaders for the various Sunday services helping them not

only select music but sometimes guiding them in how to put a service together, discussing the elements of a service, how to research for readings/rituals/music relating to the service themes/subjects. During the summer of 2024, we did a Buddhist service, a pet service, an Appalachian Trail service, a prison ministry service, a drum service among many others.

The choir rehearsal/performance season began with our first choir rehearsal on Sept 5 and participating in the Ingathering/Water Communion service on Sept 8. Alison Vernon and newly appointed contract minister Rev Pam Rumancik began meeting together and planning services in August and Sept 8 was their first service together. Our choir of approximately 24 volunteers sings almost every Sunday from Sept through June. Most UU churches only have a choir once or twice a month but CCUU has been fortunate to have a strong music program for many years. Our choir of all volunteers sings a wide variety of music from classical to folk, to musicals, to pop. We sing a prelude/postlude, two hymns and an anthem and sometimes the offertory during a typical service. Dr Razaq provides Centering/Gathering music, an offertory and the accompaniment for hymns and choir. Planning for the 25-26 season begins as soon as CCUU receives new annual themes from the Soul Matters team, typically end of April or beginning of May. Alison and Janice begin researching appropriate music that will best represent the topics and themes. It has been reported that many members of the congregation notice that the choir and piano music reflect the themes musically and really appreciate that. Planning and researching take enormous amounts of time but nothing is more rewarding than finding just the right piece of music that reflects the context of the service, especially if we can find music specifically composed by people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. We continue to cull our music library of the massive amounts of Christian music by white European male composers. This is an ongoing project and because it is also an expensive project and there are budget constraints, the progress is agonizingly slow. There are more and more UU composers producing more UU appropriate music these days and our church's membership in Association of Unitarian Universalist Musicians Ministries (AUUMM) helps us to keep current. Each summer there is a large AUUMM conference somewhere in the United State and Alison attends either in person or on Zoom. Alison also attends small Zoom workshops provided by AUUMM such as "finding music beyond the hymnbook", the new virtual hymnbook (due to be introduced to the UU church at large at GA

2025) and choir/singer warmups.

Besides the Sunday services, the choir sings at Music With a Mission and helps raise money for our service partners. We also provide music for the occasional extra service like Solstice service, and Christmas Eve. Our choir is an enthusiastic and very capable and devoted group of people. We are a spiritual practice, a social group, a musical group, a community./family and a vital music ministry. We are open to anyone who likes to sing and is willing to come to most of the rehearsals when they are healthy and available. I extend that invitation to all who are reading this and want you to know that our next choir rehearsal is Sept 4, 2025.

CCUU is also blessed to have a church band led by Tom Dempsey and including many of our members, current and former(who return just to sing on occasion). During 2024-25, the band has played for 4 services, giving the choir a service off each time. We also have an amazing group of string players featuring 3 CCUU members who occasionally provide music for our services and this year they, too, played 4 services, working on ensemble music with Dr. Janice Razak. I'm pleased and excited to share that our choir numbers are growing again and we are close to being back to our "pre-covid" numbers. On behalf of the CCUU music program I would like to thank those who support this important and inspiring work and program. Thanks to many of you, we are looking forward to more great music making next year.

*Submitted by Alison Vernon, CCUU Director of Music, and Dr. Janice Razaq, CCUU Collaborative Pianist*

## THE MINISTRIES



Our various groups, teams, and committees have been busy. Among the changes coming this year is a renewed focus on social justice and beefed up capacity and engagement. The Outreach Steering Committee will be folded into the newly created Justice Matters committee as the fundraising arm. Justice Matters will

comprise three action teams focused on (1) immigrants and underserved populations; (2) environment; and (3) LGBTQ+ rights.

A big thank-you to everyone who helped with potlucks! These events are essential reminders of importance of community and sharing, and it seems like the congregation enjoys the opportunity to get together periodically, get to know one another better, and break bread!

As you scan through the reports below, please consider joining one of the ministries or teams that reflect your personal interests. This is a great way to make new

friends and learn more about CCUU.

Activities at Countryside Church are organized into Ministries that reflect our congregational Covenant: “We unite to strengthen the bonds of kinship among all persons, to promote human dignity, and to increase reverence for life’s creating, sustaining, and transforming power through worship, study, and service.” The events, committees, groups, and programs at CCUU are organized under the themes of Kinship, Worship, Study, and Service, along with the essential work of Operations/ Foundations.

Thank you to all the group leaders and committee chairs who submitted reports for this 2024–2025 Annual Congregational Report. We are blessed at CCUU with our strong leaders and talented volunteers. There are more of you out there, so join in! It’s a great way, once again, to build your circle of community.

...submitted by Mike Berry

Ministry Council Chair &

Vice President of the Board of Trustees

## WORSHIP MINISTRY

*Please also refer to the Minister’s and Music Director’s reports*

The mission of the worship ministry is to provide a worshipful environment that provides opportunities to deepen the spiritual lives of all individuals and that strengthens the religious community at CCUU.

Worship Council members include Rev. Pam, Music Director Alison, and the worship associates: Vlad Krastev, Leslie Peet, Lois Phillips, Melanie Terbovic, Mari Van Meter, Ellen Vinzani.

We pay for copyright licensing services through OneLicense and Christian Copyright Solutions/ WorshipCast, so that we can put recordings of our worship services, including the music, on our website and our YouTube channel. Gratitude to our Tech Coordinator, Luis Diaz, who spends a lot of time editing the services so they can be put on YouTube.

The Worship Council meets once a month to review services, make suggestions, and plan future services.

On June 1, we will try something new. Rather than divide the congregation between those participating in the Buffalo Grove Pride Parade and those attending worship, we will not have a worship service that day, and instead it will be a Day of Service – encouraging congregants to attend the parade or do some other service project to help the world around them.

On June 8, we will kick off our Sunday Evening Gatherings, which will be held on the 2nd and 4th Sundays at 5 pm. Rev. Pam and Rev. Karen and a band of folks from the congregation are creating an alternative to Sunday morning ‘church.’ The hope is this will be a place to build community and to remember our connection to the whole for those whom ‘church’ is a non-starter.

### 2024-25 Worship Services

Summer 2024 Services:

- Drumming Unites Our Community – Nancy Frenk & Cindy Thornton

- Musings on the Appalachian Trail – Rick Rayborn
- A House Divided – Mark Huston
- Saying Yes to Migrants – Laura Mandell & Christine Organ
- Women of Courage – Feminine Divine Women’s Group
- Blessing of the Animals – Ed Monson & Mari Van Meter
- Refusing to Abandon – Rev. Allison Farnum from UU Prison Ministry of Illinois
- Portal to Enlightenment – Melanie Terbovic and Buddhist Study Group
- Springtime for Lucifer – Rev. Dr. C. Scot Giles

Sept-June services led by Rev. Pam Rumancik

- Ingathering & Water Communion
- Getting to Know You
- Mabon: Celebrating the Balance We All Seek
- UU Climate Justice Revival
- Sin as Separation: Who will forgive us now?
- A Two-Way Conversation
- Ancestors and Hungry Ghosts
- Grounded in Love
- The Real Sermon
- The Times are Urgent: Let Us Slow Down
- Transgender Day of Remembrance Service
- Counting Blessings with Stone Soup
- Repent! The Time is at Hand
- The Longest Night
- Christmas Eve
- One More Circle
- A Priest, a Rabbi, and a Minister Walk into a Bar...
- MLK Service: What does Justice look like now?

Continued...

# WORSHIP MINISTRY

*Worship Services led by Rev. Pam, cont'd*

- Groundhog Day All Over Again (stewardship kick-off)
- No Bad Parts
- End to Identity Politics?
- Giving Up Candy
- In God/Goddess We Trust
- Hallelujah Anyway
- Good without God
- Heysanna, Hosanna
- The Cup is Already Broken – Easter Sunday
- Earth Day Service
- May the 4th Be with You
- On Children, with Rev. Karen Mooney (all-church service)
- Imagine There's No Heaven
- Flower Communion

Sept-June Services led by staff or congregants

- Rev. Karen Mooney: Teaching for Today
- Christmas Pageant
- Winter Solstice Celebration
- Rev. Dr. C. Scot Giles: (memorial day weekend)
- Love is \_\_\_\_ led by our Senior High Youth Group
- Spiritual Journeys Service (Gary LaBedz & Beverly Leachman, facilitated by Christine Organ)
- Summer Solstice Service (Leslie Peet)
- Pride Sunday (Dan Yokas & Nancy Frenk)

Guest Worship Leaders

- Rev. Linda Slabon & Dr. Toni Tollerud: Descent to the Dark and the Rising, Defiant Spark
- Rev. Lindsay Bates: Endings – Letting it All Go
- Emma Farrell:
  - The Internal Work of Radical Welcome
  - Taking Turns for the Revolution

## KINSHIP MINISTRY



Our church Mission states that we aspire to build community and create a sense of belonging. The CCUU groups that fall within Kinship Ministry offer ways to strengthen the bonds of kinship by developing an atmosphere at Countryside Church that is inclusive, welcoming, connecting, compassionate, and respectful.

Bonds of kinship begin with relationships. Getting to know at least five other congregants, knowing one another's names and something about each other, is the start for developing a community of care. These relationships are more likely to develop while participating in a group. One of the best ways to get to know others and to become an integral part of our beloved community is to join a group.



## YOUNG ADULTS

The Young Adults group continues to provide a welcoming space for individuals in the church, primarily those between the ages of 18 and 35. The group's core mission remains focused on building a strong sense of community and attracting younger congregants through a variety of social activities. While the group is geared towards those aged 18-35, anyone over 18 who enjoys activities designed for this age group is welcome.

Since its inception in 2023 with regular game nights, the group has evolved and expanded its activities. These game nights, where participants bring games to play and often share food, continue to be a popular staple, drawing around 7 - 10 attendees each time.

Beyond game nights, the Young Adults group has organized a diverse range of social events, fostering connection and camaraderie. In addition to the regular game nights, the group has enjoyed two camping trips last summer, volunteered at the Faith Feeds food pantry, and taken a trip to Chicago to see the Green Mill variety show. They've also participated in deeper conversations through "Would you rather" questions, a white elephant gift exchange, a trolley problems night, and a bonfire. The group has even formed a covenant among its members.



The group is committed to maintaining its regular game nights and plans to host an additional activity each month, with different members taking the lead in organizing these events.

A key focus for the group is to broaden its appeal to those on the younger end of the 18-35 age spectrum. Cur-

rently, the group's demographics lean towards participants in their 30s and older. Over the coming year, the group will explore strategies to better engage individuals in the 18-25 age range, while ensuring that all current members continue to feel welcome and valued.

*Submitted by Hayden Pierce*

## SOUL MATTERS/CREATIVITY MATTERS

Soul Matters / Creativity Matters is a small-groups ministry program, running monthly from September through June, in which participants are invited to reflect upon the monthly themes tied to the larger ministerial and worship effort, using packets specifically tailored toward soul regenerative or creativity expression exercises. This past year, the monthly themes were all oriented around



"The Practice Of..." topics focusing on, for instance, Presence, Trust, Inclusion, Story (etc.). Rick Rayborn stepped in for Hayden Pierce to coordinate the program with advertising / participant & facilitator recruitment beginning in July, and the formation of 4 groups with a total of 18 participants, in September. Three of the groups were scheduled as live meets using Soul Matters materials, while the other met via zoom and invited use of both Soul and/or Creativity Matters materials. During the year, two of the live meet groups disbanded due to ongoing scheduling and commitment difficulties with some of the participants deciding to not continue, but others joining the zoom format group mid-year. The two groups that remain are thriving in participation, and will continue through June. The program will again be offered for the '25-'26 church year, and congregants, and others, are both welcome & encouraged to join. Please watch for registration information to be distributed via email notifications and Sunday announcements / blue insert information beginning in July. Rick will be (mostly) unavailable from the end of July through early September, and is requesting volunteer help with program coordination / set-up during that time period. Please let him know if you are interested in helping with next year's program coordination, or would like any other program participatory or facilitation information. THANK-YOU to all of last year's facilitator's and participants for making this program a meaningful success! Each of yours' time and energy is sincerely appreciated.

*Submitted by Rick Rayborn*



## FEMININE DIVINE GROUP

The Feminine Divine Group provides a welcoming sacred space for CCUU women to form a bond with each other and the feminine divine. We strive to be inclusive, compassionate and understanding of women, their challenges and joys as well as embrace their spiritual history. This group supports the covenant of CCUU by offering women members connectedness and engagement.

## KINSHIP MINISTRY—CREATE BELONGING

Check-in is a very important aspect of our kinship circle. We meet in person on the last Saturday of the month at 9:30 a.m. We currently have 12 members and usually 8-10 in attendance.

After check-in, we discuss a chapter of the book that we have selected for the year - currently *Women Who Run With the Wolves* by Clarissa Estes. We have presented several lay services during the summer based on the books that we have discussed. Most recently "Women of Courage" presented in August, 2024.

For more information, contact Barbara Griggs, 847-304-5436 or [bjgriggs@comcast.net](mailto:bjgriggs@comcast.net)

### TRANSITIONS

Transitions is a daytime group with a structure that includes a presentation and discussion of a wide range of topics of interest followed by a potluck lunch and the joy of sharing good food and sharing the work required to make it happen. We have appreciated the stability of this year's planning and operation. No more Covid and Zoom meetings to deal with. We met every month with the exception of August. Our attendance has averaged 18 to 25 people per month. We encourage group members to dig in to their interests and experiences and lead the program for the monthly meeting. It was a delight to learn that 2 of our regular participants have had books published about their careers and life experiences and offered to be the speaker for the meeting. In addition to each program's content, this provided an opportunity to better know the speaker and encouraged more connection with those of us listening. There is no limit to the range of topics for each meeting. We have had programs focusing on current events, travel and cultural experiences, history, and personal stories. It is always rewarding to participate in the questions and thoughts generated by the presentation. The norms of the group always include a lively discussion. Our May meeting will be a field trip at Crabtree Nature Center and a picnic. A picnic is also planned for July, with the goal of introducing Transitions to new members. Our continued goal is to keep Transitions as an opportunity to connect with others while continuing to learn from each other.

*Respectfully submitted by Kathy and George Motto*

### EARTH RHYTHMS DRUM CIRCLE

Earth Rhythms Drum Circle is a Kinship Ministry which was established in January of 2023. This drum circle was reincarnated from the original Sacred Heartbeat Drum Circle. This original drum circle was held at CCUU for over a decade prior to Covid and took a pause at that time. Earth Rhythms Drum Circle meets quarterly on Friday evenings. Since the January 2023 drum circle, we have hosted a total of 10 drum circles. We have had a total of 548 participants with an average of 55 participants per drum circle since its inception. The most recent drum circle hosted a total of 80 participants. We suggest donations of guests at the drum circles and 100% of the proceeds are donated to



CCUU. Since the most recent drum circle on April 11<sup>th</sup>, we have collected a total of \$1,817 in donations. This is an average of over \$181 per drum circle.

The drum circle is a positive opportunity to introduce and promote CCUU's mission and visibility to the community during the drum circle announcements. Coordinators and members of other Northwest suburbs and Chicago drum circles attend this drum circle and help promote this circle in the community. Drummers travel to the drum circle from as far away as Kanosha, Joliet, Rockford and Chicago. The drum circle is also promoted on Facebook drum circle group pages, a MeetUp page, flyers in the community, as well as the church's website and social media accounts, weekly & monthly CCUU e-mails, and the order of worship. We are the only drum circle that offers a disco ball and outdoor patio string lights providing playful lighting and ambiance.

This is an inclusive organic gathering where participants are empowered by the creation of rhythms, dancing, celebration, and community. Atherton Hall bursts at the seams with the energy of rhythm and creative music. All



are invited to experience the many evidence based proven benefits of group drumming. No musical background is needed, only the desire to have fun. All are welcome to bring drums, percussion instruments, and friends or some are also provided. A coloring station has been created for young drummer artists. For more information, contact Nancy Frenk at [drumnsistah@yahoo.com](mailto:drumnsistah@yahoo.com) or Cindy Thornton at [cynthiamthornton@yahoo.com](mailto:cynthiamthornton@yahoo.com).

### MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

During the year under review, the membership committee was chaired by Tom MacTavish and included Nancy Frenk, Barb Perry, Hayden Pierce, Jeannie Scown, and William (Bill) Scown. Regularly scheduled committee meetings were held on the first Wednesday of each month. In addition, the "Intro to CCU" meetings for newcomer orientation were held the 1st Sunday of each month and were led by Siri Laurin, a long-time member of this congregation and a lifelong UU. And, as a follow-up to the introductory meetings, Tom MacTavish offered the two-class series, Path to Belonging, that provides newcomers and long-time visitors the chance to learn more about Countryside Church UU and the meaning of membership, as well as the opportunity to get to know others in the congregation. The series was held three times this year in

July, November, and February with 9 people attending the classes. Including a few returning members and long-time friends, we have welcomed 10 new members this year, whose available photos are included below.

Other membership committee initiatives included helping newcomers and guests to connect more conveniently after the Sunday morning service in Atherton Hall by designating a table to welcome them. We have been pleased that it has developed into a conversation meeting point for many. Also, the committee continued its efforts to increase and improve member information in the Breeze database by assisting with collecting and posting digital photographs. And an initiative to increase our church's social media imprint was successful through the efforts of Nancy Frenk, Bailey Pierce and Cindy Thornton, who facilitated the creation and posting of 17 short videos of congregants stating their interests and experience in our church community. Our video stars' reflections appeared on Facebook and are much appreciated.

**OUR NEW MEMBERS IN THE 2024-25 CHURCH YEAR, AS OF MAY 1, 2024**

Are pictured below...

Not Pictured:

- Deirdre Moenk
- David Silverman

*[There will be a Membership Class held on May 4, 2025, and we anticipate more new members between that date and Joining Sunday on June 8.]*



Rene Ayo



Stacy Pancratz



Elliot Borgardt



Peg Galle



Adam Gerber



Maya Park Gerber



Coleen Hall



Dan Imlay



Myles Olson



Diana Sparks



The mission of Study Ministry is to create opportunities for the congregation and community to engage in meaningful lifespan learning experiences and to nurture, challenge and inspire people on their journey of personal development and spiritual

growth. Study Ministry welcomes your curiosity, love of learning and of teaching, and your desire to grow and to help others to grow.

While all of what we do here at Countryside can be considered Religious Exploration, the committees & programs that are currently part of Study Ministry include Children & Youth Religious Exploration, Family Ministry, and Adult Faith Development.

## CHILDREN & YOUTH RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

As our world continues to shift and change each day, caring for the children in our lives has become more important than ever. In response, we've created welcoming spaces—"joy and concern" boxes where children can share their thoughts and feelings openly. We've made room for quiet reflection, added playful games, and encouraged heartfelt conversations to help them navigate the challenges they face, whether big or small. When children are grounded in strong values, fear doesn't have to take the lead—confidence, empathy, and hope can guide them forward.

Each week, we invite children into activities that remind them they are deeply cared for—and that they, too, can care for others and the world around them. This work is never done alone. It is supported by a strong and loving community of families, teachers, and caregivers, all working together to create a safe and nurturing environment where children can grow, learn, and thrive.

In mid-September, Marta Jones, our Religious Education (RE) Manager, tendered her resignation for personal well-being reasons. We wish her and her family all the best. I was asked to step in as Interim RE Manager on a part-time basis (20 hours per week), based on my availability, experience, training, and my desire to support a smooth transition for the CCUU Religious Exploration program. I hold a Master of Divinity degree from Meadville Lombard (2011) and bring experience teaching and developing curriculum for diverse groups, including work as Interim RE Director at First Unitarian Society (Chicago), youth service trips, summer children's programs, young adult groups, prison teaching, and adult classes.

### Program Overview

This year began with a bi-weekly class schedule, implemented following a family survey and spring meeting. (Unfortunately, records of the survey/meeting are anecdotal.) While this change offered respite for teachers, some families found the inconsistency a barrier to participation.

In response to family concerns the RE Council held a meeting on November 10<sup>th</sup> and in response revised this format:

- **All Ages Classes:** Once/month; adults teach something they love
- **Intergenerational Services:** Nov, Dec, Feb (youth-led), Apr, Jun. These services are supported by the playground tables where the young and young at heart find activities for creative minds and heart. Many

thanks to Sarah S. for her dedication in preparing activities

- **Age-Specific Classes:** the rest of the time

**Special thanks** to lead teachers: Elizabeth P., Crystina S., Linda B., Chris S., and Kim F.

### Program Participation & Growth

- Over **50 children** participated this year; **~25 attend regularly**
- Weekly average: **22 attendees** – a **significant increase** from the start of last church year

With support from Linda B. and Debbie L., teacher orientation and training took place in September. This year's curriculum emphasizes learning based on short videos which are engaging for students (and allow the teachers to ask for help ☐).

In response to the increase in new families, the RE Council hosted an Open House on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Coordinated with a potluck Sunday, we moved the desserts into the Religious Exploration area to create a warm, welcoming environment and invite conversation. About 20 people visited, including several who shared that their children had given enthusiastic approval of our program, calling it fun and the best fit for their family among area churches. This positive feedback affirmed the strength of our offerings. To further support new and visiting families, classroom descriptions are available in the RE wing.

**Many thanks** to the **18 community members** who teach and learn with our children—your commitment is invaluable. Along with the lead teachers this includes: Juli C., Sarah S., Margaret M., Tracy B., Bill H., Stacy P., Geoffrey B., Lillian S., Deb C., Matt M./Izzi P., Steve B., Barb B., Natalie K., Debbie L., and Karen N.

### Curriculum Highlights

- **PreK–2nd:** *Bluey* – Based on the popular children's show
- **3rd–5th:** *CartUUns* – Pixar shorts, values-focused
- **6th–8th:** *D'Oh God & Popcorn Theology* – Simpsons and film-based faith discussions
- **Senior High:** *Soul Matters* – Monthly theme-based curriculum

After reviewing materials, we adjusted some content in the 3-5<sup>th</sup> and 6-7<sup>th</sup> grades for age-appropriateness, creating lessons on a weekly basis using newer films and clips.

### Justice & Community Projects

Affirming our lived values RE incorporated justice-focused themes into All Ages classes:

- Environmental activism
- Voting rights
- Veterans Day
- Hunger & economic inequality
- Cards for incarcerated individuals
- Celebrating diversity through self-portraits

**Time & Talent Auction Project:** The RE community created a collaborative coffee table featuring Earth imagery made from found objects, artfully created popsicle sticks, ceramic mosaics and glass. Over 65 CCUU members participated, symbolizing how shared effort leads to communal beauty.

**Intergenerational Events**

- **Yule Celebration (Dec):** Games and activities for kids
- **Holiday Pageant (Dec):** No-rehearse performance with joyful participation
- **RE Room Cleanup (Jan):** 12 volunteers organized, cleaned, sanitized rooms
- **SUUpper Bowl Fundraiser (Feb):** Raised nearly \$1,000 for the Coming-of-Age trip
- **Pancake Extravaganza (Feb):** Fat Tuesday celebration with Rev. Pam
- **All-Church Seder (Apr):** 10 children participated, including 8 new families
- **Monthly Family Game Night:** Ongoing thanks to Lillian S.

**Senior High Youth Group (SHYG)**

- **Workshops:** Hosted a prison justice workshop with UU Prison Ministry of Illinois (UUPMI).
- **Letter-writing campaign:** Youth partnering with UUPMI to engage in prisoner outreach.
- **Community-building:** Held three overnight gatherings plus a successful alumni event.
- **Youth-led Worship:** February's "Love" service celebrated the arts and community, complete with kazoo's!

**Our Whole Lives (OWL)**

Recognizing the importance of comprehensive sexuality education post-Dobbs decision, planning began to offer 7th–9th grade OWL in the 2025–26 church year. Recruitment and training efforts are underway, including outreach to area congregations.

**Communication Improvements**

We have strengthened communication through:

- Breeze emails targeting families
- Weekly teacher communications
- Updated worship slides and inserts
- Monthly postcards to all families registered from 2022–2025
- Bulletin board updates
- New RE logo and marketing support, including banner installations along the track field behind the church.
- **New banners** (field-facing) pending installation with messages such as:
  - “Where Wonder Meets Wisdom—and Wiggles Are Welcome. Join us!”
  - “Bring Your Brain. Bring Your Heart. Leave Your Judy Pants at Home.”

**Many thanks** to all the people who helped to get the posts in a proper location and installed (hopefully by the annual meeting.)

**Open Opportunities and Recommendations**

**Interim Goals**

- Formalize data documentation for attendance and resources.
- Develop a sustainable job description reflecting reasonable expectations.
- Investigate innovative models for supporting RE programs, including potential paid classroom support or broader volunteer engagement strategies.

**Programmatic Goals**

- Integrate children more deeply into the full life of the congregation (worship, service projects, leadership roles).
- Structure conversations with other congregations to explore successful models for family ministry and volunteer engagement.

**Historical Trends and Data Insights**

Data compiled from RE registration/attendance and church records highlights key trends:

- Significant drops in RE registration and church membership from 2015–2024, suggesting an under-tapped potential among families.
- Leadership turnover has likely affected program continuity and engagement.
- In today's social climate, offering a safe, affirming place for children to learn liberal religious values is more crucial than ever.

As our children respond to the uncertainty around them—building forts of safety, speaking of their fears—we are reminded that our work to nurture justice, compassion, and inclusion is critical. Growth may not return to the zenith of 2012–2016, but a strong, healthy RE program remains vital for the future of CCUU.

**Closing Thoughts**

This is a pivotal time for CCUU. The world our children are growing up in is complex, and our RE program can offer them vital tools: compassion, courage, community, and curiosity.

I invite more structured conversations—with each other and with peer congregations—on how we evolve the RE program in sustainable, innovative, and affirming ways. Together, we can ensure that CCUU remains a nurturing space where families thrive and values are lived out.

With gratitude,  
**Rev. Karen Mooney**  
 Interim Religious Exploration Manager



## FAITH DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH

Adult Faith Development aims to provide life-long learning and build relationships through courses, workshops, and discussion groups that . . .

1. deepen our UU faith by learning about our Unitarian Universalist history and theology and exploring our shared values;
2. encourage personal growth by offering opportunities to define and deepen values and beliefs;
3. deepen spiritual growth by exploring spiritual practices;
4. develop skills needed to work together as a community; and
5. build a foundation for social and environmental justice action.

Adult Faith Development (AFD) was reestablished in the spring of 2023 by Susan Auld, who was joined in early 2024 by Jeannie Scown. Together they developed a robust set of classes and workshops. In September 2024, Susan and Jeannie stepped down for personal reasons, and Pat Wydell and Rick Rayborn took over. Pat and Rick are grateful for the curriculum structure laid out by Susan and Jeannie, which made our jobs so much easier! As Rick moves on to new responsibilities, Susan Auld is returning to co-lead the AFD effort with Pat Wydell.

Classes from Faith Forward continue to draw healthy attendance. Faith Forward is a UU curriculum that provides handouts, videos, and facilitator guidelines for UU-oriented courses. Faith Forward classes offered in 2024–25 include the following:

- UU History 101, facilitated by Siri Laurin and Tom MacTavish
- UU Theology, facilitated by Pat Wydell and Lisa Christensen
- Turning Points in UU History, facilitated by Siri Laurin and Tom MacTavish
- Biblical Literacy for UUs, facilitated by Pat Wydell and Jeannie Scown
- Spiritual Practice, facilitated by Chris Smith and Carol Swiegert

Other classes offered in this church year include:

- Path to Belonging, facilitated by Tom MacTavish
- The New Testament as a Spiritual Tool, taught by the Rev. Dr. Scot Giles
- Tai Chi, led each Saturday morning by Melanie Terbovic
- Introduction to Paganism, facilitated by Leslie Peet
- Braiding Sweetgrass reading and discussion, led by Leslie Peet and Victoria Hathaway

As part of an effort to reinvigorate and update our standing as a Welcoming Congregation, we are currently offering Responding to the Anti-Trans Movement, a 3-session course of videos and discussion co-facilitated by Dan Yokas, Cindy Thornton, and Lisa Christensen. We will follow this up with a more in-depth course to be offered in the fall called Transgender Inclusion in Congregations. Both are provided by the group Transforming Hearts.

The Elder class track meets on Wednesday mornings and is thriving! The group focused this year on what can be learned from Blue Zones (regions where people tend to live long and healthy lives) and is currently reading books

on the Japanese concept of ikigai (purpose), the Danish concept of hygge (comfort and togetherness), and the Swedish belief in lagom (balanced living). This group has been facilitated by Leslie Peet and Barbara Walter-Reindl. Barb recently stepped down and was replaced by Karolina Kozakiewicz.

In the fall we plan to launch OWL (Our Whole Lives sexuality education) for adults. We also hope to offer a Faith Forward workshop to develop leadership skills for volunteers in our congregation.

Planning has begun to develop a comprehensive set of classes across the 2025–26 church year. Pat, Rick, and Susan are meeting with Rev. Pam and Rev. Karen to determine classes to offer that will meet our overarching goals. Facilitators are always welcome—let us know if you are interested in leading a current class or developing a new one!

*Submitted by Pat Wydell and Susan Auld  
Co-Coordinator, Adult Faith Development*

### ATHEIST, HUMANIST, AGNOSTIC (AHA) DISCUSSION GROUP

We meet the second Tuesday of every month from 7:00–9:00 p.m. We meet virtually on Zoom for 8 months of the year and in person in a church classroom May through August.

We explore an array of diverse topics related to atheism, humanism, agnosticism, science, and religion. At times we will watch a video or review a shared article or two for the first hour and then hold a discussion on the material the second hour. Attendance has been steady. There are usually 7–8 of us on hand.

People in the group have been good about coming up with ideas on topics to use for upcoming meetings, and these folks with topic suggestions also include associated videos and/or articles to share for the suggested topic. Attendees often will present on a specific topic and sometimes use a PowerPoint presentation via Zoom.

Our group has no costs to the Church other than making use of the Church zoom account for about 5-6 months, when we meet virtually and not in person.

We would welcome new attendees!

*Submitted by Andrew Cranberg*

### BOOK CIRCLE

We meet on Sunday evenings every 6–8 weeks to discuss nonfiction books about issues that impact our lives and our world. Books are chosen by consensus. All are warmly welcome to join our discussions! Following is a list of books we discussed this church year:

- Thriving in the Crosscurrent: Clarity and Hope in a Time of Cultural Sea Change by Jim Kenney
- Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard by Douglas Tallamy
- Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard
- An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

- This Is the Way the World Ends: How Droughts, Die-Offs, Heat Waves and Hurricanes Are Converging on America by Jeff Nesbit
- Humankind: A Hopeful History by Rutger Bragman
- The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again by Robert Putnam
- The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World by Robin Wall Kimmerer

*Submitted by Gail Wisniewski*

### **BUDDHIST STUDY GROUP**

The Buddhist Study Group is a study and meditation group that meets in person on the second Sunday of the month from September through June. Attendance has been steady at 5–6 members per session. There have been no costs associated with running this group.

We continue to read and discuss the book *The Road Home: A Contemporary Exploration of the Buddhist Path* by Ethan Nichtern. Through this book we are exploring internal awareness, expanding our sense of connectedness with others and the world, and exploring possibilities for a more enlightened, compassionate society. We welcome visitors and new members to join any meeting. Although the reading is a guide for the discussion, it is not required. People with any amount of experience with Buddhism, from beginners to more advanced practitioners, are all welcome. Although the leader has a background in Zen Buddhism, people from different Buddhist traditions are welcome and we honor all the major Buddhist teachings.

*Submitted by Melanie Terbovic*

### **FIRST WEDNESDAYS BOOK GROUP (New this year)**

This book group was started for people interested in discussing fiction books during the day. The group meets 1st Wednesdays at 1 pm in the Stokes conference room at church. There was an initial meeting in March and book discussions starting in April. Newcomers are welcome! The books discussed thus far:

- *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid
- *Lady Tan's Circle of Women* by Lisa See

### **HAIKU GARDEN AND WORKSHOP**



Our Haiku Garden is a result of a haiku workshop presented at our last Journeys retreat in May 2022. Grounds volunteers were consulted and interested poets came forward and joined the Haiku Garden Workshop. Haiku was planted and bloomed. Haikuists write Nature-Nature haiku (haiku showing relationships between different elements of nature and Nature-Human haiku (haiku showing relationships between humanity and nature. Occasionally, humorous haiku depicting a human situation are written and these are called Senryu. Modern English Haiku does not usually hold to the original Japanese counts of 5-7-5 since those counts in Japanese are sounds not syllables. Modern English

haiku can be 1-4 lines but usually 3. They depict two images in the form of a fragment and a phrase. The juxtaposition of the fragment and phrase creates another layer of understanding. It is said that a haiku is not complete until it is read. Haiku have a syllable count of usually 12-15 syllables. The plural of haiku is haiku. And writing haiku is a spiritual practice and a mindfulness practice.

This year, we saw an increase in poets and poems in our gardens. Our fall/winter haiku were planted and bloomed in October, 2024 and our spring/summer haiku were planted in April 2024. Plantings are announced to the congregation and meditative walks suggested. We meet monthly on Zoom and bring our haiku to critique and we have walked the grounds for inspiration. We have also read and discussed *The Wonder Code* by Scott Mason and are beginning to read and discuss *Haiku-A Poet's Guide* by Lee Gurga. Each month a poet submits a poem to Laurie Lantz to be included in e-news and focus. This year (2024-2025) we have separated our fall and winter and spring and summer haiku in order to highlight more of our haiku and actually reflect the seasons.

There are currently 20 haiku are currently scattered around the southside, front and island. We encourage you to meditatively walk our garden paths for poetry and peace.

We are still exploring the possibility of compiling a book of our Haiku that can be used for fundraising purposes. We currently have planted over 100 haiku in gardens over the last three years.

Members of the Haiku Garden Workshop:

- Susan Auld
- Martha Blus
- Juli Cicarelli
- Helen Moore
- Leslie Peet
- Denise Sepos
- Carol Sweigert

With our thanks to Emilie Cheng for her enthusiasm and expertise in the printing and planting of our haiku Siri Laurin and her volunteers for a beautiful garden and Laurie Lantz for the publishing of our haiku in CCUU news.

*Submitted by Susan Auld*

### **JOURNALING CIRCLE**

#### ***Writing Together for Self-Discovery***

The Journaling Circle truly is a spiritual practice. Writing together and sharing that writing brings about a sense of trusted community, clarifies our thinking, and helps in self-understanding. When people ask about the Circle, they often tell us that they are bad writers, but that need not be a concern. The quality of anyone's writing is not what journaling is about. We are not concerned with proper grammar or language. Our sharing is respected, encouraged, and confidential.

We started meeting over five years ago; currently we meet on Zoom the first Thursday of the month, from 10:00 to 11:30. There are twelve members presently. We join when we can, so attendance varies. See the weekly updates and blue insert for more information. The members of the Journaling Circle, both new and long-time members, are very active in the church. They give much in terms of time and service, recognizing that Countryside enriches their lives in all kinds of ways.

We take turns facilitating the group, but our group is

## STUDY MINISTRY—INSPIRE CURIOSITY

self-directed and respectful in that everyone is heard and given a chance to speak or pass. Every month, we choose prompts related to the UU monthly themes. We start with a short meditation to center ourselves. Then we do free-writing and writing to prompts. Through sharing our writing we also share life's journey and deepen relationships within the community. Come join us and discover the spiritual practice of writing to reflect, listen, learn, create, and explore.

*Submitted by Juli Cicarelli*

### LAST MONDAYS BOOK GROUP

The Last Mondays Book Group meets at church each month. The group has been in existence since 2001. Group members choose primarily fiction books from a broad spectrum of genres and take turns facilitating the discussions. There are generally 5–10 members in attendance. Again this year, the group donated a basket to the Time and Talent Auction. We encourage others to join us, for just one book in particular or every month.

This year's books:

- *No Two Persons* by Erica Bauermeister
- *Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls* by David Sedaris
- *The Frozen River* by Ariel Lawhon
- *The White Lady* by Jacqueline Winspear
- *North Woods* by Daniel Mason
- *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler
- *Lula Dean's Little Library of Banned Books* by Kirsten Miller

Some upcoming books:

- *Even Though I Knew the End* by CL Polk
- *American Dirt* by Jeanne Cummins

We encourage people to join us, whether it is to drop in for one book in particular or to come every month.

*Submitted by Barb Braje*

### OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION

In the Open Forum Discussion, each week we discuss "the issues of the day" – as defined by our participants – in a moderated discussion. We aim to respectfully discuss those issues, even when we happen to disagree with each other about them. Topics may involve current events, politics, culture, or more philosophical subjects. On our email list, we send "Gently Recommended Material" to participant subscribers, often in the form of a debate, which participants may review, if they wish, in advance of discussing that week's topic.

To receive the Forum email of weekly topic announcements, please email Lead Facilitator and Moderator, Vid Axel, [vidaxel@axel designs.com](mailto:vidaxel@axel designs.com)

*Submitted by Vid Axel*

### READING ROUNDTABLE

Reading Roundtable is a very engaged group that meets twice a month; the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month at 10:00 a.m. Currently we are reading essays from Vital Ideas-Crime; a Great Books Foundation publication. The text covers crimes committed by "Lady Killers" in Mississippi to the trial of Oscar Wilde and much more. Each selection encourages discussions through

thought-provoking questions provided in the book. We may veer off topic occasionally, but with everyone's different perspective we certainly have some lively and interesting discussions. Newcomers always welcome.

For more information contact Barbara Griggs, 847-304-5436 or [bjgriggs@comcast.net](mailto:bjgriggs@comcast.net)



Efforts to make a change for the better are often difficult to do alone. The Countryside Service Ministry offers help to overcome this problem. By working together and sometimes with like-minded organizations, we can make a difference.

The Service Ministry has a long history with Countryside Church, and the efforts of its committees have made a significant contribution to the community at-large and the well-being of the church congregation. It embraces particularly the first two and last two of our Unitarian Universalist principles:

*The inherent worth and dignity of every person  
Justice, equality and compassion in human relations  
The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all  
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*

In addition to our Lay & Care Ministry program, through which we provide service to one another, the Service Ministry committees—Green Sanctuary, Outreach Steering Committee, and the Chalice House team—are all actively making a difference. For more information, see each committee’s annual report. If you want to make a difference and put UU values into action, join one of these groups or contact a Board member about how to launch a new team to support your passion. Any member of the Countryside Church community can participate. If we are to continue as a viable, socially active organization, it’s also important that you do so. Participating in one or more of the Service Ministry committees is rewarding and invigorating. The time involved offers opportunities to get to know others who share your interests, to socialize in constructive efforts, and to make a difference.

## GREEN SANCTUARY COMMITTEE Foundational Efforts

Green Sanctuary’s sustainability efforts have continued strong this year. The no-till garden and east ditch projects under the careful watch of Mike Calwas, news articles on green initiatives skillfully written by Leslie Peet, and Dan Huntsha’s compost subscriptions and creative new project development all thrived at new levels. The Committee met monthly with a core group of six members and hosted drop-in visitors with interests in our projects or support.

### Collaborations

Our partnership with the Worship Ministry continued this year in the Atherton Hall Winter Solstice service, when The GSC provided fresh pine boughs for the worship spiral of boughs and lights and for food, kitchen, and cleanup volunteers. The Evening was well attended with approximately 60 people walking the spiral.

Green Sanctuary members Victoria Hathaway and Leslie Peet led reading circles in collaboration with Adult Religious Education for a second year, following our well attended offering of *Spiritual Ecology* in early 2024. This year the roster of discussions included *Braiding Sweet-*



*grass and the natural health-centered series Blue Zones, Ikigai, Hygge and Lagom.*

### Increases

The number of gardeners on the 14 garden plots have increased by two since last July, and fresh produce delivered to the Palatine Food Pantry hit a new high at 380 pounds.

### Strong wins

After more than two years of research and meetings with the boards of Countryside and the Palatine Park District, Mike Calwas finally made the east ditch restoration a happening. In March, 2025, the project went from dream to reality, thanks to Mike’s generous donation to cover the entire cost of a fully insured controlled burn. See the [March sermon archives](#) for Mike Gilley’s drone footage of suited up burn workers smoking the ditch with their flaming wands while a dozen congregants stand in witness. Then fast forward mentally to a summer 2025 east ditch ablaze with native prairie colors. We’ll all want to have our phone cameras ready for that marvelous show.

Dan Huntsha’s Shared Leadership Pilot has provided some critical support of leadership this past year while providing core group members with a rotating set of responsibilities that mirror the cross-training models of industry. After a year of role rotation, the GSC has fine-tuned the model to work well in most roles, and Dan has recommended replication of the pilot to other Green Teams in the Northwest area.

### Challenges

Engagement in lifestyle transition or action does not come easily or often for us as a faith-based community. Last year’s Green Sanctuary potluck offered chat tables with Countryside members experienced in the transition to electric vehicles, rooftop solar, heat pumps and community solar programs. They were only lightly attended. One person is known to have installed a home heat pump afterwards. The turnout for writing postcards or texting letters to legislators has also been minimal to none.

One aspect of the Shared Leadership Model is still a hard sell-- that of publicity. Publicity’s a bit like the many headed Hydra the ancient hero is asked to behead: he thinks he’s conquered it till another head rears itself and another and-- oops, he didn’t see that one coming, either.

### New Channels of Influence

During Earth week, the GSC typically showcases award-winning films in sustainable land and energy use. Following the cancellation of last year’s film offering for low registration and the successful offering of a reading circle in *Spiritual Ecology*, we pivoted this year to Adult RE as a way to educate and influence congregants in earth stewardship. Luckily, we were rewarded with an increase in engagement of minds and hearts and participant numbers that equaled or exceeded those of film events.

For our 2025 Earth Month Event, Dan Huntsha has recruited a Panel of 3 proponents of sustainability: Barbara Hill of Sierra Club, Representative Mary Beth Canty of Illinois, and Dan of Faith in Place. Each will describe the work they are doing and the work that we faith-based communities can do as well. There will be actionable items posted at tables after the Question and Answer session.

### Emerging Possibilities

The new Justice Matters team has revitalized Social Action and brought SA, Welcoming, Green Sanctuary and

## SERVICE MINISTRY—HEAL OUR WORLD

the OSC under one umbrella. The GSC is looking forward to the shared strength of collaborative efforts coming from this new energy, especially where there are intersections of social and environmental justice.

The new Marketing team may be helpful in easing the load of publicity work for events planned by Justice Matters members. We hope they will assist the GSC in our Earth Week and Solstice publicity efforts.

The next wave of solar panels on the Countryside roof already has strong donor interest expressed several times to the GSC. We are in hopes that this may inspire some movement of the Board in that direction.

In July 2025 there remains a question of who the new Green Sanctuary contact person will be.

### Conclusion

While Green Sanctuary still has challenges in our committee's environmental and advocacy efforts, we are still inspired by the dedication of our members and the positive responses of those in our congregation who have embraced sustainable lifestyles and advocacy. As we go forward, we stay committed to expanding our own advocacy opportunities and fostering a culture of active, faith-based stewardship. We believe that as we continue to be faithful in our efforts and to grow in our own understanding of creation care, our community will also grow in its capacity to love and serve the earth and all its inhabitants.

*Submitted by Victoria Hathaway, GSC Chair*

## JUSTICE MATTERS COMMITTEE

### Overview

In early 2025, the CCUU embarked on a significant reformation of its approach to social justice work through the establishment of a dedicated Social Justice Task Force. This Task Force was charged with assessing current practices, identifying structural challenges, and recommending a more agile and effective model for justice work. Their efforts culminated in the creation of the Justice Matters Committee, a newly envisioned structure designed to align with UU values, improve speed-to-action, and foster deeper community engagement in justice initiatives.



### Task Force Leadership and Members

The formation and recommendations of the Justice Matters Committee were the result of the thoughtful and dedicated work of the Social Justice Task Force, led by Co-Chairs Mike Gilley and Janet Oriatti. Task Force Members were: Rev. Karen Mooney, Bill Scown, Wendy Wittkamp, Cathy Maraist.

### Problem Statement

The Task Force identified a core issue: "The congregation lacks a structure that is agile enough to enable speed-to-action regarding social justice and social action matters for most members."

This was later expanded to include all facets of justice—particularly environmental justice—leading to the broader framework of 'Justice Matters.'

### Process and Stakeholder Engagement

The Task Force took a thoughtful, inclusive approach, engaging key internal and external stakeholders:

- CCUU Outreach Steering Committee (OSC)
- Congregational listening session
- Standing committees (Green Sanctuary, Living the Welcoming Congregation)
- Individual interviews
- Source documents and proposals (e.g., by Yvette Johnson and Susan Auld)
- Governance documents
- Comparative input from North Shore Unitarian Church's Democracy Action Team

### Identified Congregational Needs

From this engagement, four key needs were identified:

1. Speed-to-Action – Agile mechanisms to respond to urgent justice issues.
2. Community Building – Foster belonging through collaborative action and shared experiences.
3. Strategic Alignment – Sync justice work with existing congregational investments (e.g., Green Sanctuary, partner fundraising).
4. Pathways for Action – Clear, accessible routes for congregants to get involved.

### Recommendations and Outcomes

1. Justice Matters Committee Formation:
  - Bill Scown: Justice Partner Fundraising & Co-Chair
  - Wendy Wittkamp: Board Liaison & Co-Chair
  - The former OSC was redefined as the Partner Fundraising Team
2. Creation of Action Teams:
  - Immigration & Underserved Peoples Action Team (Lead: Lillian Schnitzler)
  - Environmental Action Team (Lead: Victoria Hathaway)
  - LGBTQ+ Action Team (Leads: Nancy Frenk & Dan Yokas)
  - Democracy Action Team (Lead: Lillian Schnitzler)
  - Integration of Community Services such as PADS Meals and Fair Trade

### Committee Structure & Roles

Justice Matters Committee Co-Chairs:

- Lead the committee and its leadership team
- Coordinate efforts with the CCUU Board
- Set operational boundaries and communication protocols
- Support fundraising, Action Teams, and educational initiatives

Action Teams:

- Evaluate and propose initiatives
- Engage with service partners
- Promote congregational participation

Action Team Leaders:

- Convene team meetings
- Propose vetted actions to leadership
- Oversee approved actions

Partner Liaisons:

- Maintain service partner relationships
- Identify collaboration opportunities
- Act as communication bridges with the congregation

**Governance and Communication**

To ensure effective operation:

- Criteria have been established for vetting and approving actions
- Communication processes were defined and are in ongoing development
- A dedicated email channel (justicematters@ccuu.org) was created and will be managed
- A Justice Matters calendar was created on the ccuu.org Service Ministry page

**Next Steps**

- Recruiting members to participate on Action Teams
- Develop an operating guide document that will serve as a reference for committee members about fundamental processes for carrying out justice work
- Work collaboratively with the CCUU Board to clarify and, where appropriate, amend existing policies that limit who may speak or act on behalf of the congregation. This includes establishing clear "rules of the road" to ensure that public expressions of support—such as banners, signage, or participation in events—reflect the shared values and governance of the congregation.
- Communication to the congregation through weekly eNews (email), website update, Justice Matters Calendar, Action Alerts (email), periodically hosting a Justice Matters table in Atherton Hall after service, and other events aimed at educating and recruiting.
- Refinement of congregational communication opt-in/out processes

**Conclusion**

The formation of the Justice Matters Committee represents a pivotal evolution in CCUU's Service Ministry. Through structured leadership, integrated Action Teams, and community-driven engagement, CCUU is positioned to respond more effectively to justice issues and deepen its commitment to living UU values in action.

**LAY & CARE MINISTRY PROGRAMS**



We are completing the 38th year of providing Lay and Care ministries to the Countryside Church congregation. During 2024-2025, the Lay Ministry was fortunate to have the following people continue to serve in the program: Ken Bobbe, Barbara Griggs, Helen

Moore, Joy Simon, Chris Smith and Ellen Vinzani.

This Lay Ministry Team supports and expands the pastoral care of the called minister, but the Team also serves to strengthen the ties among the members of the congregation through the active embodiment of the spirit of mutual care. This is a special Team in the congregation and requires particular attributes in order to insure that we are taking the best care within the congregation that is possible.

During the 2024-2025 year, all Lay ministers were involved calling every member of Countryside. This was an effort to touch base and determine the wellness and needs of families and friends. We find this to be very helpful for us and for the congregation in general.

The Lay/Care Ministry has met monthly via Zoom or

in-person at church. At each meeting, we check-in with each other, review current Lay and Care Ministry activity, determine availability and write and send cards to members needing support.

Lay/Care Ministry co-hosted a Pot Luck Lunch after church in November, along with the Membership Committee.

Our Care Ministry coordinator, Mary Johnson, continues to arrange for practical assistance, such as check-in calls, and meals for Countryside members when appropriate. Arrangements for Care Ministry help are made through Rev. Pam or myself.

We have mourned the loss of these church members during 2024-2025:

- Tim Walsh passed away on August 18, 2024. A Celebration of Life was held at CCUU on November 23, 2024.
- Richard Auld passed away on November 27, 2024. A Celebration of Life was held on January 25, 2025.

Relatives of church members were also mourned in 2024-2025:

- Denise Sepos's stepmother passed away on June 22, 2024.
- Richard Urban's sister passed away on June 29, 2024.
- Ken Sepos's sister passed away on July 3, 2024.
- Yvette Johnson's brother passed away on August 9, 2024.
- Cherita Axel's father passed away on August 10, 2024.
- Alan Greenland's father passed away on September 27, 2024.
- Mike Gilley's mother passed away on December 5, 2024.
- Dan Yokas sister passed away in January, 2025.
- Christine Organ's father passed away in early January, 2025.
- Jim Peterson's sister passed away the end of January, 2025.
- Larry Tilford (Jason's grandfather) passed away on March 5, 2025.



*Submitted by Ken Bobbe, Coordinator*

**OUTREACH STEERING COMMITTEE (OSC)**

Committee Members: Bill Scown (chair), Mike Berry, Mari Van Meter, Nancy Dempsey, Margret Myren, Lillian Schnitzler, Marie Mauter. Thanks to Christine Organ and Laura Mandell for their care of our Chalice House family.

The OSC was formed to address "the human needs of the larger community" and to "manifest our UU principles and make the world a better place."

**Our Service Partners and CCUU volunteer roles**

- Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants (ICDI) and Chalice House: Many CCUU members contribute to running Chalice House, and ICDI supports the families who reside at Chalice House through their case

## SERVICE MINISTRY—HEAL OUR WORLD

management and social services.

- Partners for Our Communities (POC): Several CCUU members volunteer at POC's language learning lab and Faith Feeds Food Pantry.
- Faith in Place: Our regional Green Team Director, Dan Huntsha, coaches our Green Sanctuary Committee in ways to create change and fight for those impacted by environmental injustice.

### Our Fundraising activities for 2024-25:

- **Music with a Mission:** One hundred forty musicians, Countrysiders, friends, and Service Partners came together to celebrate our fall fundraising event, "Music with a Mission" on November 9, 2024. Record breaking proceeds netted \$3,891 from 120 paid entries. Jeff Phillips, Nancy Dempsey, and Mari Van Meter co-chaired the event, Judy Ball and John Evans organized the bar and Ed Monson oversaw the kitchen. Twenty-five additional volunteers provided refreshments and donated their time to help the event run smoothly. The attendance at this event continues to grow yearly due to Jeff Phillips' talent curating wonderful local musicians.
- **Time & Talent Auction:** "Hope Rises" was held on April 26th. Our dynamic auction team of Nancy Dempsey and Mari Van Meter once again did a stellar job on CCUU's biggest social event of the year featuring a Spring Picnic Banquet and bar; live entertainment by "Jeronimo" and our very own Mari Van Meter; live bidding and presentations from our service partners. The event raised about \$32,000 for our service partners and CCUU. This year's proceeds are especially critical in this time of devastating reductions in Federal funding for family assistance programs and grants.
- Share-the-Plate donations were back in full force with \$4,400 collected for STP nominees as of April.
- Food Drive for Faith Feeds Food Pantry

### OSC Goals for 2025-26:

- Integrate OSC fundraising activities and service partner connections with the new Action Teams of the Justice Matters Committee.
- Hold Music with a Mission in the fall and the Time & Talent Auction in the spring.
- Further strengthen the connections between our Service Partners and the congregation.
- Continue to offer financial support to our Service Partners.

*Submitted by Bill Scown, OSC Chair*

## CHALICE HOUSE



CHALICE  
HOUSE

[Chalice House](#) is a shared project led by Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist and a coalition of partners. It provides community-based housing to immigrants seeking legal protection in the U.S. from some sort of serious threat (war, violence, persecution) in their home country. The home is on the north side of the CCUU property and is owned by

CCUU. Since 2020, we have hosted eleven people – two families of three, one young adult, and our current family

of four, Yevhenii, Alex, Veronika and Milana. They are from Sumy, Ukraine, near the northern border with Russia. They arrived in July 2024 through a humanitarian parole program, [welcome.us](#). Both Oleksander and Yevhenii are working in Palatine, and their two girls are enrolled in Palatine schools. They are all doing well and saving money with the goal to move into their own apartment soon.

For all of our families, our partner Illinois Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI) serves as the legal sponsor and provides a caseworker who connects them to social services. The Chalice House community provides housing, mentorship and hospitality. We help them learn their way around, learn English, tend to their physical and mental well-being, and find employment. We also provide social activities, transportation, and moral support. All of this is designed to prepare the newcomers to become self-sufficient and achieve financial independence within about a year, depending on how quickly they receive a work permit from the US government.

While the well-being and progress of our guests is the most important measure of success of the program, the sustenance of the program is an important goal. By that measure, too, we are on solid ground.

### Countryside Church

- The program continues to pose no financial risk to CCUU's annual operating budget thanks to the ongoing commitment of Community Partners, individuals, and CCUU members who donate to Chalice House via the Time & Talent Auction and Music with a Mission.
- CCUU members are actively involved as mentors. In FY 2024/2025, that team included duRee Bryant and she was joined by two people from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church and one person from Willow Creek Community Church.
- Chris Smith is serving as property manager. Numerous other members, visitors and friends of CCUU are actively involved with our guests, providing transportation, gift cards, and outings.

### Community Partners

- In addition to ICDI, we have several key partners:
  - POC is an invaluable resource to our residents, providing food, clothing, and English practice.
  - Our Saviour's Lutheran Church shares the cost of housing with a monthly donation, and actively participates as mentors.
  - St. Michael's Episcopal Church has donated between \$3,000 and \$10,000 each year since 2019.
    - First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights has contributed both money and time every year since 2019, and hosted several events.
    - Southminster Presbyterian Church hosted a potluck dinner with Ukrainian entertainment for all of our families.
- The Garden Club of Inverness cares for the garden.
- Various volunteers helped with home repairs including tile repair and smoke alarm installation to meet

village guidelines.

### **Join the Team!**

If you want to get involved, email us at [ChaliceHouse@ccuu.org](mailto:ChaliceHouse@ccuu.org). In particular, we would like to find someone who'd like to serve as a treasurer.

### **Immigration Issues**

The Chalice House team is part of the Social Outreach team focusing on Immigration and we engage with several local and national groups monitoring and advocating against the new Administration's actions against immigrants. Our former and current residents are all in the country legally and have the proper documents to prove it. Our current family is here on humanitarian parole. Additionally, they have filed for asylum and the application was accepted in February 2025. Our former families are legally seeking asylum and have legal representation to get them through the legal process.

Please continue to support our partners -- SelfReliance Association, ICDI, Partners for Our Communities -- and other organizations who service many immigrants, both documented and undocumented. You can stay abreast of the situation by subscribing to newsletters published by NIJC, CLINIC and ICDI.

### **Financial Report**

The annual budget is \$32,000 as follows:

- \$16,000: cost of housing (this goes to the CCUU bottom line in the form of 'rent')
- \$4,000: incidental needs, basic home maintenance
- \$12,000: monthly stipend for the residents until they secure employment. (This is currently covered by ICDI but we could face the need to cover it ourselves in future if their funding is threatened.)

In FY 24/25 our community partners contributed an estimated \$29,000, including donations from the key partners noted above and an estimated \$10,000 from CCUU outreach fundraising events. We have a balance forward of about \$29,000 to help us sustain the program.

### **Home Maintenance**

- The Garden Club of Inverness continues to maintain the garden pro bono.
- The CCUU capital reserve is technically responsible for home improvements, but we hope to augment that with fundraising. Within the next five years we anticipate needing the following:
  - Dryer
  - Roof and gutters (and maybe solar panels?)
  - Exterior painting and siding
  - Driveway replacement

*Respectfully submitted,  
Christine Organ and Laura Mandell, Co-Chairs*

## OPERATIONS/FOUNDATIONS MINISTRY



*The care and running of our congregational home resides increasingly with staff but depends on the involvement, skills, and time of our congregants.*

The Operations/Foundations Ministry includes all things pertaining to maintaining and operating our building and grounds, the equipment, the use of our building, as well as our means of communication – with each other and the broader community. Much of that is overseen by Laurie Lantz, our Congregational Administrator, with the support of a few of our members and friends. Budgetary items fall primarily in the Buildings/ Grounds section of the budget, with “operations committees” being Aesthetics, AV, Historian, IT-Tech, Leadership Development, Marketing & Communications, and Safe Congregation (background checks for those working with children & youth).

### BUILDING AND FACILITIES

Don Bak has been a big help this year—from patching and painting the west wall in the Sanctuary to fixing the urinal to repairing the ADA door and one of the ovens in the kitchen. Thank you, Don!

Spring and fall roof inspections continue to help with reduced leaks & expenses as well as extending the life of the various roofing systems in place on the building.

We have started an annual maintenance/inspection program for our lift pumps (for taking sewage from our building to the public sewer line), and we had some recommended repairs done in the fall.

Our beautiful aging building has needs that must be addressed in the future:

- The replacement of the roofing and aging siding on the classroom wing along with the roof top HVAC units (RTUs) there. The siding in particular is looking pretty bad and will need some paint/stain sooner rather than later.
- Replacing the roof and RTUs on the classroom wing will make it "solar ready" and would allow us to expand our array to fully power the church.
- The potential exists to add battery storage to allow the church to be more resilient in the event of severe weather or other electrical service disruptions. This would allow us to take advantage of better rates from the utility too. Selling back peak demand electricity generated from the panels while charging the batteries on lower cost off peak base load rates.
- The siding over the sanctuary and Atherton Hall needs painting.
- The parking lot pavement replacement/ overlay The sealing and striping bought us a few years - no more than that.
- There are a number of small cosmetic items in the sanctuary that need tending to.
- The bathrooms in the original building are due for a "refresh" with new partitions, sinks, paint and potentially lighting.
- The stager and Choir area theatrical lighting fixtures are beyond their service life and components are increasingly difficult to find.

- The kitchen appliances are due for replacement and the kitchen itself can use a refresh, all surfaces and cabinets are "well worn".
- Carpet replacement is in the future Regular cleaning and maintenance has extended the life of the current carpet and it is important to recognize that it will not last forever. For the congregation's consideration and as fundraising allows, we may look at some alternative flooring in areas which can be more easily cleaned and have reduced maintenance expenses.
- The congregation needs to consider passive security improvements to protect ourselves from various risks ranging from severe weather to fire to planned violence

*Submitted by Steve Black & Laurie Lantz*

### GROUNDS WORKING GROUP (GWG)

The members of our group are Siri Laurin, Peggy Simonsen, and Mike Calwas. Lillian Schnitzler has joined the GWG as our part-time worker, dedicating 10 hours per week. She brings valuable interest in and knowledge of Illinois native plants. Throughout the year, we have organized several workdays where church members volunteered to assist with special projects. The workload exceeds the capacity of our three core members and part-time worker; thus, having congregation members volunteer their time is immensely helpful.



GWG is responsible for maintaining the church's landscaped areas. Mike has focused on removing invasive weeds in the ditch east of the building, reclaiming small sections annually to plant native species. He has spent considerable time herbiciding invasive weeds across the church grounds, significantly reducing the populations of thistles and dandelions. Additionally, he has worked diligently to cut and eradicate buckthorn.

We prepared three areas for new landscaping by covering them with black plastic. Two zones on the west side of the island and the alcove on the east side of the building were managed by volunteers.

This year, the Board of Trustees prioritized our landscaping initiatives. The GWG solicited bids from three Illinois native plant landscape companies, ultimately selecting Green Guerilla to replace the current landscaping and install a native garden on the west façade of the building, north of the entrance. This project will be executed in the spring of 2025, partially funded by contributions from this year's auction. We extend our gratitude to a generous church member who donated a \$5,000 downpayment.

Green Guerilla recommended applying for the ComEd Green Region Grant Program. Recognizing the importance of open spaces, ComEd and Openlands support non-profit organizations in their efforts to protect or enhance public spaces. This year's grant emphasizes climate resiliency through nature-based solutions and pollinator conservation. The following summary from the grant proposal was submitted by Siri Laurin and Lillian Schnitzler:

“This project will transform a 7000 sq/ft public landscape into a biodiverse native plant haven for pollinators. Rain gardens for stormwater management and prairie

plants for carbon sequestration will increase climate resilience. Signage amid the garden paths and educational seminars will inform the community about the importance of pollinators.”

To meet the grant requirements, the church demonstrated it had \$5,000 designated for this project, the church received an additional \$5,000 donation. We will be notified by mid-July regarding the acceptance of our grant proposal.

Mike has endeavored for years to facilitate a prescribed burn in the back ditch. Pizzo & Associates conducted the burn in early spring. Fire serves two primary purposes in prairie management: suppressing or eliminating non-native species and reducing accumulated plant litter.

*Submitted by Siri Laurin*

## AUDIO-VISUAL

Accomplishments:

- \* We Installed a Click-Share wireless conferencing system in the Stokes Boardroom. When the user plugs a dongle into their laptop, their video content appears on the room’s display, and the room’s video camera, loudspeakers and microphone array are connected to their laptop. This allows quick, easy collaboration over Zoom, et al.
- \* As part of the above improvement, we have installed a ClearOne webcam and a Nureva conferencing sound bar. All AV improvements to the Stokes Room have been courtesy of Jeff Phillips.
- \* We installed a video “confidence” monitor at the back of the sanctuary, to mirror the sanctuary’s big screen, so the worship leaders can know what’s being shown behind them. Thanks to Linda and Tom Kuna, who donated their old 55” display for this purpose.
- \* Thanks to Ed Monson, who donated a mini-PC so that we may have a device at the AV table, from which to play slides and videos. Jeff donated the video monitor and keyboard for this PC.
- \* We have remoted the antennae for the sanctuary’s wireless microphones, resulting in much better reception and fewer audio drop-outs. This was accomplished using labor and spare parts, courtesy of Jeff Phillips.
- \* Jeff also acquired a hand-me-down PTZ camera from a client, and installed it in the sanctuary, removing the need for a tripod-mounted camera.

Challenges:

- Chancel (stage) lighting. Our 35-year-old dimmer packs and lighting fixtures continue to fail. This is one of many capital expenditures the Board will need to take into account as they plan for the future of CCUU.
- We are still using the freeware video switching software (OBS) that we began using out of necessity during Covid. We would like to replace our video system with a dedicated video switcher, plus new PTZ cameras.
- At replacement cost, our AV inventory at CCUU has surpassed \$100k. Any maintenance, replacements, or upgrades would need to come from the capital reserve and/or a future capital campaign.

- Luis, as our Staff Tech Coordinator, continues to do AV not only for Sunday services, but also for weddings, celebrations of life, and other special events. He has been asked by renters on a few occasions for more wireless microphones than CCUU owns. Right now, our sanctuary is equipped with four wireless receivers, and six wireless transmitters: Four handheld and two pocket transmitters (for use with lavalier mics or head-worn mics). We can only use four transmitters at a time, because we only have four receivers. If we had two more receivers, we could be more accommodating. Our wireless mic systems are 15 years old, so there is a good chance we can find extra receivers on the used market.

Thanks to Luis Diaz and to volunteers Ed Monson and Mike Gilley and all others who have assisted with AV production at CCUU. We make things work each and every week.

*Submitted by Jeff Phillips (he/him/his), AV Committee*

## MARKETING TEAM

While many individuals at CCUU have long been engaged in separate marketing efforts across social media, print materials, event promotions, and more, we haven’t been operating as one cohesive team. That changed on April 13, when we officially launched the CCUU Marketing Team. We aim to bring these efforts together to amplify our impact and ensure more people can find a spiritual home rooted in justice, inclusion, and compassion.



CCUU’s mission guides our communications work: to create belonging, inspire curiosity, and heal our world. Together, we’re building a unified, values-based approach to help people discover who we are and feel welcome from the first interaction.

### Key Activities and Highlights:

- **Website Redesign**  
Our redesigned website will launch in the coming weeks. This refresh aligns with our updated branding and improves accessibility, SEO visibility, and ease of navigation for newcomers and longtime members alike.
- **Merchandise Launch via Teemill**  
We are launching a print-on-demand merchandise store through Teemill, a sustainability-focused platform that uses circular production practices. Members will be able to order apparel and goods at any time, and we also have the option to coordinate occasional wholesale buys to reduce cost and shipping. Our merchandise avoids gendered language to reflect and affirm the gender diversity of our congregation.
- **Building a Unified Voice**  
The committee is working to bring cohesion to CCUU’s print, web, and social media presence. By clarifying our messaging and visual identity, we aim to ensure that people encountering us for the first time experience a clear, welcoming, and values-driven introduction.
- **Skills & Capacity Building**  
Our team includes members with strengths in design,

## OPERATIONS/FOUNDATIONS MINISTRY

writing, social media, video editing, press outreach, and more. We use shared tools and collaborative platforms to coordinate efforts and identify big and small volunteer opportunities.

- **Next Steps**

We're finalizing a communications intake form for church events, continuing work on signage and social media assets (including Buffalo Grove Pride), and preparing additional outreach strategies to grow our visibility across multiple channels.

In a time when more people are searching for spiritual homes aligned with progressive values, our message has never been more vital. We invite everyone to help us "draw the circle wider—together."

*Submitted by Elizabeth Van Orden*

### PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

*The Personnel committee is an Operations committee which reports to the Board. Linda Berry currently chairs the Personnel Committee in conjunction with the Minister. Peggy Simonsen has been the Board liaison to the committee.*

#### Personnel Committee Responsibilities

- Provide support to Minister on Personnel matters.
- Develop and update long range staffing plans to ensure sufficient and talented staff to meet evolving congregational needs.
- Provide guidance and supporting documentation for salary and benefits recommendations for budget.
- Provide guidance and supporting documentation for employment offers to new hires.
- Administer the performance review process for all full and part-time employees in conjunction with the Minister.
- Ensure existing personnel policies are maintained and enforced.
- Ensure that job descriptions are updated for all employees as positions evolve.

#### Accomplishments this Year

- With resignation of Marta Siné, helped onboard Rev. Karen Mooney as Interim Religious Exploration Manager.
- With Minister, Congregational Administrator, and Board President, ensured compliance with changes in retirement and medical benefit plans.
- Due to significant increase in current healthcare plan, researched options for potential January implementation.
- Developed budget recommendations for existing and new staff salary and benefits, in consultation with Minister and Board Treasurer.
- Met with budget team for on-going budgeting process.
- Provided guidance to staff on all personnel matters.

#### Goals for Upcoming Year

- Provide support for co-ministry.
- Help determine future RE staffing needs.
- Assist staff with job restructuring as needed.

*Submitted by Linda Berry*



# Countryside Church

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

