

Annual Reports 2023-2024

CareGivers Support Group

The UCM CareGivers Support Group, launched in May 2022, welcomes anyone caring for a spouse, child, parent or other loved one. Participants share challenges and fears, hopes and uncertainty, despair and joys. We shed tears, laugh, hold space, and breathe in silent, deep reflection - - as the moment moves us. We listen, wanting to truly hear one another. Participants often relate that this group is the only place where each can speak their truth, and be met with compassionate understanding. The group meets every two weeks, year 'round, on Zoom. The group is open to new participants at any time throughout the year.

Gale Pekar and Hugo Liepmann, facilitators

UCM Caring Network Annual Report 2023-2024

The UCM Caring Network is a volunteer group of individuals whose mission is to respond to the needs of the congregation as they arise. Typical requests that come to the group are for meals and rides, but the network coordinator will evaluate any request, possibly as a reference point for other church or community services. This past church year found 44 volunteers potentially responding to 13 requests for a service. There may be multiple people in the group responding, particularly for an ongoing situation. Some degree of follow-up is provided by the coordinator to try to ensure that the needs of the congregation are met. One particular need arose immediately after the July flood. A decision was made to attempt to contact members and friends in the current directory the church did not know anything about to determine their status and respond to any request for support. The following individuals volunteered during a very difficult time to be callers: Elaine Ball, Liz Benjamin, Paula Gills, Judith Hinds, Betty McKinnell, Johanna Nichols, Gale Pekar, and Ruth Witte. Immense thanks to all of our volunteers for being willing to serve the congregation!

Paula Gills, Coordinator

Church History

Church Records A continuing endeavor – shepherded by Claudia Clark and Peter Thoms – is to gather and file active and recently discovered older documents. These include copies of Weekly Announcements, Sunday orders of service, sermons, obituaries, important financial documents, and records of significant capital improvements, such as the new AV and Air Quality projects. To enhance our digital records capacity - we spent \$425 for two new hard drives.

Vermont Quebec Universalist Unitarian Convention (VQUUC) This year we received an \$870 grant. In May, UCM member Steve Finner begins a two-year term as President of VQUUC, and will represent UCM at the 2024 Annual Meeting in Middlebury. VQUUC, incorporated in Vermont in 1888, includes all UU congregations in Vermont and Quebec. Steve wrote a brief history of VQUUC in April of this year, to be included in our archives.

Highlights of the Year

Women's Alliance With creative leadership from Sarah Franklin – Peter presented a visual history of UCM in 12 objects – at the October meeting of the Women's Alliance. It was held at the Brick Church in East Montpelier; UCM was unavailable – from the July flood.

Rev. Charles Allen After the History Group pondered alternatives, a smaller version of a recently-discovered photograph of our first minister, Rev. Charles Allen (instrumental in founding and serving the Church of the Messiah, 1864-1869), was framed by the Drawing Board and installed in the Fireplace Room. The caption relates the significance of his tenure.

Historic 1928 Blueprints On the morning after the July flood, Ana Neuburger discovered two water-damaged blueprints under the vestry stage. They were prepared in February 1928 by a Hanover, NH architectural firm, after the catastrophic flood of November 1927. The drawings describe the basement and first floor. They have been

restored by Carolyn Frisa of Works on Paper of Bellows Falls, for a discounted cost of \$300. After study – to determine their significance (that is, were the blueprints ' recommendations followed), and after a showing in the vestry on a Sunday, they will be stored. High quality photographs may be taken, for display.

Return of Vestry Photographs and a Painting A few months after the July flood, when they were removed from vestry walls, three large photographs of the congregation (2001, 2006, and 2019), an aerial picture of UCM from 1982, taken by Charles Ferry, and a photograph of Catherine Orr), were restored in place. A fine, small oil painting of the church, by Elmer Warren (c.1965), was moved from the Fireplace Room and hangs to the right of the vestry stage.

Looking to 2024 – 2025 We will prepare a full inventory of photographs, drawings, and paintings that hang on UCM's walls. We will ponder whether to retain over 50 very old books from the 19th century. And we will prepare an exhibit honoring Thomas Silloway, the architect (and Universalist minister), who designed the State House (1857) and UCM (1865).

Members, 2023 - 2024 Elaine Ball, Claudia Clark, Sarah Franklin, Kenric Kite, Dave Peters, Barbara Thompson, and Peter Thoms.

Report of the 2024 Grace Clarke Lecture Committee

Committee Members: Sandal Cate, Abby Colihan, Kathy Johnson, Mary Jane Ohlson
Many volunteers were recruited to assist with baking desserts, ticket sales, set up, serving and clean up. All help was greatly appreciated.

The Grace Clarke Lectures for 2024 were planned for February 17 and March 16. Due to the church kitchen being unavailable, the committee planned to host a dessert and beverage sitting followed by the lecture. We started planning in early January to line up notable presenters as well as soliciting bakers and workers. We coordinated with the UCM office to have tickets sold online as well as in person during coffee hour.

The February presenter was Al Freeman, the Climate Forester for the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation who helped us learn about visible and future changes to our forests. We had about 50 attendees. It was a nice opening night, and we coordinated with the Vestry overnight accommodations team as they would be having people in the building later on due to the cold temperatures.

The March presenter was Alex Tait of the National Geographic Society. About 70 people attended that night and enjoyed “traveling” with Alex to the Himalayan region of the world.

For both events we had tasty desserts donated by several church members. We charged \$10 for adults, \$5 for children and \$25 for families attending each event.

The main purpose of the series is for ecological education and sociability, but it has been customary to charge for food and beverages. This format of “dessert and beverages” was much easier for the committee to arrange, and we do recommend keeping with this format in the future.

The committee and the UCM Executive Team were quite pleased to be offered a substantial amount of money by a church member to re-endow the Grace Clarke Lecture funds this year. This will allow the series to host either professional or reputable speakers who can present enlightening talks in the realm of ecology and the environment well into the future. It supports our church mission goal of helping to “protect the Earth, our home.”

If you know of potential speakers or wish to assist with this series in the future, please contact an Executive Team or Clarke Lecture committee person listed above by the end of this calendar year. We welcome your ideas and help.

Submitted by Sandal Cate

Climate Action Team (CAT)

The mission of the Climate Action Team has been to serve as a support group that works toward positive action both individually and collectively, while striving to educate, engage and challenge the entire congregation toward ever more sustainable living, and to create bold, measurable initiatives toward UUA's Green Sanctuary Recertification.

Team participation has been inconsistent, but mainly has been Sandra Haddock, Anne Sarcka, Margaret Schultz and Mary Alice Bisbee. Also, earlier in the year, Harris Webster participated.

Mary Alice and Sandra met twice in the Fall to begin to write the "Who We Are" portion of the Green Sanctuary application but did not get very far. The CAT had a "retreat" last August where about 10 members gathered to support each other's climate anxiety and brainstorm programs for the coming year. Several CAT team members also attended the VIPL's Lament for the Earth on the Equinox, September 23rd. Beginning in January, we attempted to have 1-2 regularly scheduled meetings per month, of which a couple were well attended with lively discussions, but attendance was sporadic, mainly due to scheduling conflicts as it was difficult to find a time that worked for people. Having purchased a number of copies of The Climate Book and giving them out to members of the congregation, we hosted a book club and subsequently planned to propose a challenge to the congregation to join us in the 1.5 degree Celsius lifestyle, which was discussed in the "solutions" section of the book. This initiative would provide a friendly & accessible way for congregants to speak with each other about changing the way they live in the face of climate change, and give us an initiative to report on for our Green Sanctuary efforts. The team participated in the April 28th service, Keep the Circle Whole, and brought this initiative to the congregation during coffee hour afterwards.

As Chair, I have been sustained by my passion for sustainable living and seeking to live ever more lightly upon the Earth. I loved feeling that we could make a difference. Unfortunately, I have been overwhelmed with other commitments and have had to resign my position a month prematurely before my tenure was up. I believe Anne Sarcka will provide much more consistent and available leadership for this team

moving forward. CAT definitely needs to find a way to attract more members and elevate the energy behind the message to be a spark in the revolutionary shift at hand.
Submitted by Sandra Haddock

UCM Community Lunch

Volunteer Coordinator: Lisa Earle-Centers

Site manager – Janet Poeton

Advisory Committee – Claudia Clark, Abby Colihan, Steve Gold, Scott Hess, Fran Krushenick, Hugo Liepmann, Ilene Siegel, Linda Sproul, Janet and John Poeton.

Weekly volunteers: on average 14 volunteers each Monday

Mission: The mission of the UCM Community Lunch Program is “to provide the best possible healthy meal in a least restrictive environment for the least amount of money.”

We welcome all to build a loving community

We serve a very diverse population. All guests are warmly welcomed verbally by volunteers who serve and eat with our guests and offer information and help with other needs and questions. All tables are cloth covered, music is provided, guests and volunteers are often invited to sing and sometimes even dance. Frequent positive comments suggest that everyone feels valued and deeply appreciated.

Serve human need

We always keep two things in mind:

When dealing with food – safety and cleanliness

When dealing with people - dignity and kindness

We serve a freshly cooked meal with salad, vegetables, homemade desserts and a beverage each Monday from 11:30 until 12:30. Volunteers are needed in shifts from 8:30 until 1:30. Sign-up information is in the weekly e-news. Questions may be sent to

ucm.communitylunch@gmail.com. Meals are now being cooked and served at Christ Church, 64 State Street.

We provide home deliveries as needed and offer take-out meals.

This year we have been providing hot beverages and breakfast snacks to guests who arrive early in need of warmth and companionship. Each week 20 snacks, fruits and desserts are provided to Another Way for the Monday evening meal.

Protect the Earth, our home

We still partner with Community Harvest of Central Vermont and The Vermont Food Bank for fresh produce and protein. We recycle. We deliver leftover meals to Another Way. We clean and sanitize everything before and after use in the kitchen and dining area.

Flood Update

Since the flood and the pandemic the cost of meals have increased almost 300% and donations have decreased by 85% .

We continue to welcome all and provide a high quality meal in a welcoming environment with music. All donations are appreciated.

Community Pouch Annual Committee Report

Members: Winna Curran, Steve Finner, Sarah Franklin, Kenric Kite, Fran Krushenick, Ansel Ploog, Juliana Plummer, Dell Waterhouse, Dawn Evans (ET rep), Janet Poeton (chair)

Mission: To direct half of the pouch cash and other monies labeled Community Pouch to a local non-profit aligned with the mission the UCM - showing diversity of organizations throughout the years.

The committee expanded its membership and has met three times. We are working toward having a file for all past recipients and outcomes after a group receives the

pouch. An example is Circle of Courage, the November 2023 Pouch Recipient. They shared their talents during a service in April 2024.

Suggestions for the pouch are received from committees, individuals and groups from UCM, submitted to ucm.communitypouch@gmail.com or by a committee member and chosen by the committee.

This year, pouch recipients have been UCM Care Committee, Just Basics, Circle of Courage, CVRAN, People's Health and Wellness, Rainbow Bridge Community Center, Montpelier Gospel Choir, UCM Community Lunch, Friends of the Winooski, and a group suggested by the youth of UCM. Thanks for your generosity.

Congregational Life Coordinator and Membership & Hospitality Committee

Committee Members: Elaine Ball (staff), Nancy Read

Our Mission Statement: *The Membership & Hospitality Committee provides welcoming and outreach to newcomers, members, and friends of the church with the intention of fostering a sense of belonging in our spiritual home.*

We have begun working as a more loosely-organized team, delegating certain tasks to others in the congregation who are not on 'The Membership & Hospitality Committee.' With only one staff member and one congregant currently active, this committee is no longer functioning as it has in past years.

The primary responsibilities of this team have been to:

- Offer hospitality & welcome for newcomers, and fellowship within the church community by training Hospitality Team Volunteers (Baristas, Greeters, Hospitality Hosts, and Ushers)
- Assist UCM's Congregational Life Coordinator and Minister with planning & offering 'New UU' sessions each Fall and Spring, as well as "New Member Sunday" services

- Help the Minister and the Congregational Life Coordinator contact persons interested in the church; keep in touch with church members; and keep accurate membership records
- Promote understanding of Unitarian Universalist (UU) principles – by regularly engaging with UCM programming, reaching out to get to know UCM friends and members, and actively building our loving community

Before the 2023-24 Church Year began, in July 2023, Montpelier and many other areas in Vermont experienced historic flooding, severely damaging our building, the homes of at least two of our congregants, and much of the surrounding area. As the flood waters were rising, church members and friends began calling each other to check in, asking if they needed anything, if they were on high ground, if there were ways others could help, etc. Our Caring Network shared the work of calling approximately 400+ people, all the members and friends listed in our Church Directory, to make sure everyone had what they needed, and felt connected and held in our community.

As the 2023-24 Church Year began in September, we were displaced from our building and held services at the North Branch Nature Center. It took a dedicated team of Worship & Arts, Women's Alliance, and Membership & Hospitality volunteers to come together in this temporary space, to set-up and clean-up, make Coffee Hour happen, and invite friends and family to these services. They were well-attended and congregants were grateful to have space to be together in person after a difficult summer – rather than closing/canceling services, as we had to do during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once we were able to return to our building, we held “New UU” sessions, in November 2023 and April 2024; two Activities Fairs, in the Fall and the Spring; and a Newcomer's Brunch in March. Approximately 14 - 18 participants attended one or both of the “New UU” classes offered. The “UU History & Theology” class with Rev. Joan was well-attended in both the Fall and Spring, while the “All About UCM” classes reached five participants total. ***We are deeply grateful to all who attended and helped to host these classes, events, and meals – and to all who helped call and check in on***

each other during the summer – it is because of you that we fulfill our mission to welcome all.”

Members and friends of UCM also volunteered to be hosts and attendees for three Circle Suppers in the Fall of 2023 – as well as a Thanksgiving Leftover’s Potluck – enabling both newcomers and longtime community members to meet new people and connect with each other over a meal.

We hosted one New Member Sunday service this Church Year, on April 14, 2024, when ***we welcomed five New Members***, two of whom had signed the Membership Book previously, and three of whom signed that day. Each received a Membership Certificate, signed by Rev. Joan, a carnation, and a copy of the “Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide,” edited by Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray.

In April 2023, we comprised 262 active, voting members (258 certified December, 2022) – as of April 2024, we are 240 (236 certified December, 2023).

One way that we keep our membership records current is, at the end of each calendar year, we compile lists of once-active UCM members who have not contributed “an identifiable financial contribution” over the past 12 months.

During the months of December and January, 2023-24, Elaine reached out to approximately 40 members who no longer met the criteria of membership, to ask if they would like to retain their membership, passing along pastoral concerns to Rev. Joan when appropriate. Of these, 21 resigned their membership and/or no longer met the criteria.

Since 2019 (pre-pandemic), our membership had ***increased*** (from 252 certified in 2019 to 258 certified in 2022), while across the country during these same years, “Churches [have been] closing at rapid numbers.” At 240 active members, we find that despite the fluctuations of each individual year, our congregation remains robust and strong, continuing to grow over time (from approximately 220 members in 2015).

While we recognize the difficult times we are all facing, and regret the loss of 20+ active members, we gladly welcome our 5+ new members this year, and continue to be hopeful and committed to living into our mission to welcome all, build a loving community, nurture each person's spiritual journey, serve human need, and protect the Earth, our home.

1 The elevator was damaged in the flooding of July 2023, and has not yet been repaired/replaced.

2 Accurate records serve two primary purposes: most importantly, we account internally for the number of active, voting members so that a quorum can be met at Annual and Special Meetings, when we conduct the business of the church; and secondly, we certify the size of our congregation annually with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), of which UCM is a Member Congregation.

3 Article II: Membership in our [ByLaws](#) (adopted 2013 and most recently amended 2021) reads in part: "A person remains an active member as long as s/he has made an identifiable (i.e., not anonymous) financial contribution and has participated in an activity of the Congregation at any time during the preceding twelve months."

4 [' Losing Their Religion: why US churches are on the decline,' by Adam Gabbatt, January 22, 2023](#)

Denominational Resources Group 2023-24

As there is only one member of the congregation who is a member of this group, this report is written in the passive rather than the first person singular voice.

The Good News

The main focus has been on developing a process for selection and credentialing of UCM delegates to the UUA General Assembly which will result in a full delegation which is representative of the congregation. To this end, a draft process was presented to the Board a few months ago. The Board modified and has executed the process and with the assistance of the minister and the undersigned, has recruited a full slate of five delegates. They range in age from 39 to the late 70's or early 80's. One is male and four are female. Three have previous experience as GA delegates.

This slate shall be presented to the Annual Meeting of the congregation for acceptance and ratification. This is the first time in many years that such a process has been followed which has resulted in a full representative slate of delegates. The minister is due major credit for this singular accomplishment.

Two members of the congregation continue to be active in the Vermont Quebec Unitarian Universalist Conference. The Board has named the undersigned to be the delegate to this year's conference on May 18th at the Champlain Valley Congregation in Middlebury following which our delegate will become the president of the Conference serving for the next two years. Our other active member is on the Nominating Committee.

Three members of the congregation have been involved in the Housing Organizing Committee of Vermont Interfaith Action. The fourth has just become involved and as a result one of our members will be moving over to the Corrections Organizing Committee which focuses on issues affecting the incarcerated. There are serious problems in this area which demand the attention and involvement of faith communities.

The minister has applied to the UUA Fund for Social Responsibility for a Congregation Based Community Organizing matching grant of \$750 to be contributed to Vermont Interfaith Action.

The Not So Good News

A group of one is not a group. It is suggested that the congregation and the Board consider what message is being sent when only one person is carrying most of the responsibility for denominational matters and relations. The Board may want to consider appointing one of its members to assist and focus in this area with the goal of recruiting more congregational members to be involved.

Also, it is noted with sadness that because of financial stringency, the proposed congregational budget maintains a reduced contribution to the Unitarian Universalist Association. It is hoped that eventually the contribution can be increased to its former more generous level. It is hoped that UCM members are aware that the UUA Disaster Relief Fund granted \$50,000 to this congregation following the flood in July.

Report submitted by Stephen L. Finner, Ph.D.

Executive Team Annual Report for FY2023-2024

Members: Rev. Joan Javier-Duval, Dawn Evans, Leslie Parr, and Donna Russo-Savage

Purpose: The role of the Executive Team (ET) is to manage the affairs of the Church at an operational level. Unlike the Governing Board, the ET does not make broad governing policies or set goals for the Church, but instead implements the Church's Mission. The ET operates by consensus and is convened by the Minister. The ET meets regularly with the professional staff as a combined Management Team.

Activities: During Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the ET's work has focused primarily on responding to issues arising from July's catastrophic flood. In addition to working with the Flood Recovery UU Team (FRUUT), the ET has considered and addressed issues such as:

- Did the church need a remote work policy? How should staff be reimbursed or compensated for expenses incurred related to remote work?

- At what point did we need to make alternate plans for the start of the church year? (e.g., Where would Sunday services be held? Would it be possible to offer Sunday morning Spiritual Exploration for children and youth? Where would the choir rehearse? What space could be used for community gatherings such as coffee hour and Adult Spiritual Exploration offerings?)
- How would we continue to provide the Community Lunch?
- For how far into the future would we need to cancel rentals?
- What budgetary implications of the flood would need to be addressed (e.g., lost rental income and the purchase of flood insurance)?
- What steps can the church take to ensure a safe and healthy environment, particularly in the aftermath of the July flood, within our church building for staff, volunteers, and church members?

The ET also provided guidance and assistance to an array of committees and ad hoc groups concerning issues such as the Community Lunch program, the Community Pouch, the Clarke Lectures, and ongoing efforts to hire a Director of Spiritual Education. The ET also finalized a substantial revision to Church personnel policies, completing work begun by its Personnel Committee in October 2021.

The ET hosted three Committee of Chairs meetings in November, January, and April, providing opportunities for sharing committee accomplishments and plans, and for the Board and ET to provide updates.

The lay members of the ET took greater responsibility for day-to-day operations during Rev. Joan's sabbatical time from mid-December to mid-January especially in regards to supporting the Board with financial oversight.

Beginning in December, the ET focused on assisting the Finance Committee and Governing Board to prepare a proposed budget for the upcoming Church fiscal year. With recognition that increases in some expense areas were necessary at a time when Church membership and participation had not rebounded to pre-flood levels, creating a balanced budget was a daunting task. The ET expresses gratitude for the diligent efforts of the Stewardship Committee and for everyone who made pledges for the coming year. Ultimately, hard choices were necessitated by the continued challenge of raising enough revenue, including pledge contributions, to support our growing operating

expenses. With gratitude to the diligent efforts of the Finance Committee and the thoughtful work by the Board, a well-considered and pragmatic budget will be presented at the upcoming Annual Meeting.

Submitted by the Executive Team

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee met numerous times throughout the year. The major intense concentration in late winter and early spring was to establish a fiscal year 2024/2025 budget recommendation to the UCM Governing Board. The committee was tasked with matching the anticipated income and anticipated pledges to the fiscal needs of the church and compensation for the staff. The committee also implemented increased internal financial controls for the institution.

Submitted by Scott Hess, Chair

UCM All Church Holiday Fair

This All Church activity is led by Sandal Cate, Kristin Glaser, Ginnie Humphreys, Leslie Parr, Jo Romano, and John and Janet Poeton.

The July 2023 flood swept away all support materials for the Fair, except the Gazebo! Thanks to each person who saved, power washed and repainted it, the Fair had its long standing trademark front and center. The kitchen could not be used so there was no Norma's Ham Loaf.

Some highlights were: the Friday night Cocoa Bar with youth music, the huge amount of donated children's books, jewelry and items for gifts, the wreaths decorated by volunteers, and the amazing talent of the UCM bakers for all the sweet and savory treats, as well as the fresh pecans!

All were welcome to donate, volunteer, and purchase. There was a lot of positive energy creating a loving community. Items were sold at a low cost as the larger community had taken quite a hit in July and again in early December. Items remaining

at the end of the Fair were donated to local charities to support the protection of the Earth from an abundance of things.

Planning for the 2024 Holiday Fair has begun. It will be the first weekend in December – Friday the 6th and Saturday the 7th. Hope we see you at the Fair!

Submitted by Janet Poeton

Music Program/Committee

Submitted by Donia Prince, Director of Music

As with all other church activities and programs, the start of the church year for the Music Program was shaped by last July's flood. Fortunately, the choir is well practiced in flexibility from the pandemic years, as we had to find rehearsal space in other locations until we could safely move back into the sanctuary. While we missed our sanctuary, we appreciated the intimacy of singing at the North Branch Nature Center for our first services.

The Music Program's only significant physical loss due to the flood was the blower for our organ, which had been located in the basement. We were able to borrow a blower so that we had our organ back for December holiday performances, and are now awaiting installation of a new blower, which will at least initially be located in the space behind the organ. Apart from some tuning issues because of rapidly changing humidity levels, we thankfully avoided damage to our pianos.

Shortly after the flood occurred, I asked our UCM choir if they would like to get together to learn and sing a beautiful piece of music that had been written in response to another water disaster, the 2004 Asian Tsunami, and perhaps ask singers from other choirs to join us. There was an overwhelmingly positive response, and the Montpelier Flood Choir was born. Twenty-five past and present UCM choir members, along with about 40 other area singers, joined together in late July to rehearse at the Vermont College of

Fine Arts. The rehearsals themselves were immensely moving and healing experiences, and groups of singers performed our 3 piece set outdoors at the Montpelier Farmer's Market, in front of City Hall (once the bulk of the debris was removed,) and in front of the Statehouse prior to one of the public forums. Apart from the ministry of the rehearsals and performances themselves, this experience was valuable in creating connections within the community, and establishing a model of collaboration which has carried over into other activities.

A highlight of the musical year was the post-covid/post-flood return of the Community Carol Sing in December. In a break from the tradition of each participating church preparing separate musical offerings, this year we worked together with Lynette Combs of Christ Church and Christopher McWilliams of Bethany Church and First Congregational Church of Berlin, to create a large, combined choir performing multiple pieces. Members of the Old Meeting House Choir also participated. Hosted by UCM and very well attended by the greater community, there was a palpable feeling of joy and relief to all be gathering and singing together after the isolating covid years and the trauma of the past summer. The event was recorded by ORCA Media.

Our UCM choir generally sang at about 3 services per month, with guest musicians performing for the remaining services. The choir has gained a few new and returning members, but also lost some due to health and mobility issues, exacerbated by the loss of the elevator in the flood. We have presented a diversity of music, including music from classical, folk, popular and African-American musical traditions, in addition to pieces by Native American, Arabic, South African, and local composers. About half of the music we have performed has been by women composers. Some children and youth joined us for one service. One intention this year has been to try to feature more individual choir members in solo capacities, with at least 10 different choir members having had featured parts. While our overall numbers have not increased this year—currently around 20, with inconsistencies due to travel and health--I feel we have gained in cohesion as a musical and supportive community.

The choir enjoyed an inspiring 3-hour workshop with vocalist David Ruffin in November.

A musical highlight for our congregation came during our pledge drive in February and March, when each week we featured multiple musicians from our own congregation, including Case Phinney on organ, Lotus on piano, Kenric Kite with his traditional group "North Branch", Esme Beaudry singing and playing guitar, Paula Gills, and Eileen Shine with Vic and Elena Guadagno playing and singing together.

Other congregants who have shared their musical gifts with the congregation this year have been Kris Hammer, Heather Moz and Lindsay Wade, Callum and Isla Robachek, and Dan and Will Lindner, in addition to a number of choir members singing solos or duets. Choir members whose voices have been featured in some capacity this year include: Amy Cavanagh, Bronwyn Fryer, Kate Latz, Diane Marie, Phil Morse, Eric Oberg, Kathleen Poole, Nan Prince, Tom Schersten, Cecile Sherburn, and Garret White. Staff members Rev. Joan, Elaine and Emily joined me in performing a musical setting (by me, at the poet's request,) of a poem written by a new church member for the recent new member's ceremony.

Additional guest musicians have included Marc Gwinn, Jon Gailmor, the Montpelier Community Gospel Choir, Carolyn's Angel Band, and The Cronos.

Our spring choir schedule was disrupted by my being out for a few weeks due to a surgery and subsequent recovery. The choir carried on fabulously on their own at 2 separate services, with the help and guidance of our pianist Eliza Thomas, and the leadership of individual choir members. This also resulted in the postponement of and some changes to the Music Sunday Service. Originally scheduled on April 21st to coincide with Earth Day, it will now be held on May 19th. The program is called Earth Songs and will feature our choir and Eliza Thomas performing selections in honor of the earth, along with projected images and spoken word. Last year we had also offered the Music Sunday program in an evening performance for the greater public and were looking forward to doing the same again this year, but will not be doing so because of the changing circumstances. We are already looking forward to trying again next year!

In addition to the choir serving the mission of the church community through its contributions to church services and community collaborations, as a church group our

non-auditioned choir serves to fulfill the church's mission for its individual members. In order to welcome all, build a loving community, serve human need and nurture each person's spiritual journey, we continue, for example, to provide rides and other support for those in need, to provide extra support for people to learn their music with practice tracks as possible, and to recognize important milestones in each other's lives. While for many in the choir the act of working hard together to produce high quality music is an important spiritual activity, the choir is also a close-knit supportive community in itself.

Our pianist Eliza Thomas has continued to provide exquisite music for preludes and postludes, as well as accompanying the choir, being an integral part of the Good Friday Tenebrae service, and generally being a generous-spirited and skilled support to the Music Program.

A Music Committee per se has not been active this year, although individuals (notably Lani Seifert, KaeMaple Poole, Ginny Sassaman) have been invaluable helping with specific projects, for example keeping the music library organized and documented, keeping track of member's birthdays, staffing activity fair tables, advising on Music Sunday questions, and more.

Property Committee

The Property Committee has directed virtually all of its time this year to flood recovery work.

Racial Justice Group

RJG Team: Dell Waterhouse, Steve Finner, Judith Hinds, Paula Gills, Sarah Franklin, Peter Thoms, Liz Benjamin, Margaret Blanchard, Barbara Thompson.

The focus of our work together:

1. Advocate and educate within the UCM community around the 8th principle of building the Beloved Community.
2. Outreach to local racial justice groups and BIPOC-led organizations.

Our collaboration with Farmer Ama of Salon Black Walnut continues to grow. We co-sponsored a Black History event in February: OurStory Dance and Poetry party. RJG contributed money from our budget allocation to help fund the BIPOC artists who made the event a success: Ama Peyman, Kiah Morris, Rajnii Eddens, and the DJ Saddao and Diversity.

Salon Black Walnut planned a Spring Seed Swap and Human Family Potluck event in the Vestry on April 19, 2024, again featuring Black artists and drummers.

Following the February event, Hazel Turrone of The Everything Space requested collaboration with UCM's Adult LSE program and the RJG to sponsor a workshop on Racial Trauma for White People, based on the work of Resmaa Menachem, author of *My Grandmother's Hands*.

Kim Pierce, President of the Board of the Montpelier Gospel Choir, requested RJG's collaboration on an event in May, 2024, focused on the healing ministry of Gospel Music. It will feature a viewing and discussion of the PBS special, *Gospel*.

On November 26, 2023, RJG members who accompanied Rev. Joan on a Living Legacy Pilgrimage to Civil Rights Sites in Selma, Birmingham, and Montgomery Alabama shared their stories at a Sunday service. In February, the group did a slide presentation for the Women's Alliance after dinner program.

For the second year in a row, RJG is a sponsoring congregation for DRUUMM's Public Worship fund raiser to be held on May 8, 2024.

The most fulfilling aspect of our work this year has been learning to work together as a team and to value the contributions of all RJG participants.

**Report from Interim Director of Spiritual Exploration
and The Spiritual Exploration Committee
Annual Report 2023-2024**

Sally Armstrong-Interim Director of Spiritual Exploration

Committee Members: Liz Benjamin-Chair, Johanna Nichols, Tim Favorite, Ian Campbell

Mission Statement

The Spiritual Exploration Committee working in community, supports opportunities for transformational learning, faith formation, action, and fellowship across the lifespan within our congregation.

When I came on board in October, after the devastating July flood, my main goal was to help get our program out of the ditch and back on the road. There's still a lot of mud on the tires, but the backroads are drying out, and Spring is here. It won't be long until someone new takes the wheel and steers us safely into the future.

Back in October, we were meeting at the North Branch Nature Center. Teaching teams were in place, curricula had been selected, and Liz Benjamin schlepped plastic bins of supplies back and forth faithfully every week. The Preschool/Kindergarten cohort met inside, the Elementary team gathered under a tent, and the Middle School group met at a picnic table under a tree. North Branch offered opportunities to expand the lessons with short walks and tiny field trips on the trails, but as fall approached, there were some chilly Sundays, and we were all looking forward to being back at 130 Main.

As we continue to regain traction, it is rather remarkable that we have provided quality programming for children in preschool through eighth grade every single Sunday. Despite all the challenges we faced this year we never once had to cancel Sunday morning offerings for lack of teaching teams. Even when children stayed home...the teachers did not. When we were hit with two snowstorms and volunteers had trouble

getting into Montpelier due to lost power and road conditions, those who made it seamlessly combined classes, lessons, and art projects. Our volunteers truly live out the mission of our church. I continue to be amazed at the caliber of the programming our volunteers provide. They often adapt and enrich the curriculum, making it deeper and richer than what the authors provided. Their commitment, caring, compassion, and creativity are what have kept our program alive and growing.

We have 36 children who are officially registered in our program and many others, like our adult congregants, who come in and out on an occasional basis, as well as visitors who come once or twice. On Sunday mornings, we have an average of about ten children present. It may be a different ten children from one week to the next, but we seem to stay in the same range.

Numbers are interesting, but they are an incomplete picture. Our success cannot really be measured by statistics. On the other hand, it is difficult to assess how children learn to trust adults and peers, giving them the confidence to join discussions, share joys and concerns, and know that they are an integral part of our spiritual community. Just as with adults, it's important for children and youth to know that they matter and that they belong. There are no numbers for that.

We have begun to offer Jr. Coffee Hour on the first Sunday of the month. The idea is to give parents the opportunity for adult conversation and to give the children a chance for fellowship and snacks with their peers.

Beyond Sunday morning groups, we have a blossoming Middle School cohort of seven young people. What a delight to see this developing. It is especially affirming to witness and recognize the empowerment of this group who bravely asked for what they needed and wanted.

We also have a snail-mail ministry for fifteen emerging adults who have recently Bridged from our church. The lack of a post office has made this a challenge at times, but it is a wonderful reminder for the young adults and our congregation that our love and concern follow them wherever their chosen path takes them.

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”

John F. Kennedy

Submitted by:

Sally Daab Armstrong IDSE

Spiritual Exploration Committee Report

The Spiritual Exploration Committee works with the Director of Spiritual Exploration to support the volunteer leaders, provide supplies for the program, and give out information to all at the Spiritual Exploration table each Sunday. The committee has also organized special events to enhance our intergenerational connections at UCM. These include the Beach Day at Wrightsville Reservoir, the non-competitive kickball game, and March Mystery Madness, during which new friends of all ages meet and get to know each other.

The committee is very appreciative of our interim Director of Spiritual Exploration, Sally Armstrong, who has encouraged us with her good ideas and her positive attitude. We look forward to new initiatives as we connect with a new Director in August. We welcome all who care about our significant and enjoyable programs for children and youth.

Liz Benjamin, Chair, Ian Campbell, Tim Favorite, Johanna Nichols

Adult Spiritual Exploration Team

The purpose of the ASE Team this year was to support Rev. Joan in her Adult Spiritual Exploration ministry. Our goals were:

- to maintain and expand the Chalice Circle program;
- to support ASE offerings by other UCM groups such as the Climate Action Team (CAT), the Racial Justice Group (RJG), and the Membership & Hospitality Committee; and
- to offer one or more faith development classes/discussions.

Organized more as a network than a formal committee, we met twice early in the year for planning purposes. Since then, we have worked via email and informal contacts. Contributing members included Elaine Ball, Sandra Haddock, Judith Hinds, Rev. Joan, Hugo Liepmann, Paul Ohlson, Leslie Parr, Gale Pekar, Nancy Read, Barbara Thompson, and John Turner.

Chalice Circles: Two new Seasoned Souls groups and one new Small Group Ministry were added. The Caregivers Support group continues, and welcomes new members as needed. More Circle facilitators are needed; please speak to Rev. Joan if you can fill this role.

The CAT led a discussion series on Greta Thunberg's climate book. The RJG sponsored two multicultural events and hopes for a spring series based on *My Grandmother's Hands* (if enough people sign up). The Membership & Hospitality Committee, along with Congregational Life Coordinator Elaine Ball, ran two New UU classes (fall and spring).

Rev. Joan prepared and facilitated a four-part exploration of proposed changes to Article II of the UUA Bylaws, "Purposes and Covenant." The wording of this section defines who UU's are as a people of faith. Participants in the series reflected deeply on

the meaning of Unitarian Universalism in their personal lives and the life of our congregation.

The ASE Team welcomes more members and ideas for new offerings. One caveat – if you suggest a new offering, please be prepared to help make it happen!

Submitted by Judith Hinds, Team Leader

Stewardship Report

UCM's Stewardship Team led our annual pledge drive, themed 'Transformed by Our Care.' This theme was inspired by a line from the song 'Wake Now, My Senses,' which includes the line "work toward a planet transformed by our care." After the damaging floods of July (and December), we were inspired by both the care and generosity of our communities' responses and the clear interdependence of our human world and the planet.

For the drive, the Stewardship Team recruited around 20 people to make personal calls as part of the pledge drive. We hope that this process led to some fruitful conversations and connections. We are so thankful to our stewards, many of whom serve in multiple other capacities at UCM, for offering to be a part of this drive in this way. The Stewardship Team is also thankful to our staff and the many people involved in creating UCM's budget.

This year, we raised \$366,453 and received 183 pledges. Thank you to everyone who pledged! Pledges represent around 80% of UCM's income and are vital to continuing the mission of this spiritual community.

As I look ahead at the future of Stewardship, I see the need to stay creative and realistic. At one of our early Stewardship meetings, Rev. Joan shared some language from another congregation that really struck me. In particular, the statement, "we are a mixed-income community." This simple statement of fact grounds me. The financial demands of our budget mean that we are asking a lot of our congregation during our

pledge drive and sometimes, as was the case this year, we have to go back and ask for more. Yet this process stays rooted in self-determination and respect – each person or family evaluates their capacity to pledge and by how much. ‘Mixed-income community ’ means that all contributions to UCM – pledge or donation; volunteerism or presence – of all amounts, are valuable and valued. Thank you for the ways that you are a steward.

Abundant joy and deep gratitude to our Stewardship Team this year: Brenda Bean, Fran Dodd, Scott Hess, Rev. Joan Javier-Duval, Ansel Ploog and Peter Thoms. Special thanks to Brian Prendergast for his graphic design.

Submitted by Ansel Ploog

Women’s Alliance

The UCM Women’s Alliance resumed their monthly meetings in September of 2023 despite the church building being closed due to flood damage. We met offsite in September at the Old Meeting House Parish Hall in E. Montpelier Center for a potluck supper and special program about the paintings of James Franklin Gilman, as many copies of his work were on display there. Our October meeting was at the Old Brick Church in E. Montpelier Village for a potluck and program by Peter Thoms who shared several artifacts telling of earlier times at UCM. Finally, we returned to UCM in November for a combined meeting with the E. Montpelier and Calais Historical Societies. We enjoyed a musical and historical presentation by Linda Radtke who sang “Songs of the Suffragettes” under the auspices of the Vermont Humanities. Our post-Holiday Fair celebration dinner included an evening of music by Rich Atkinson and Bob Sassaman. Early in the New Year we all sang along with Lindsay Wade and Heather Moz in a program of songs from the “American Songbook” with Sally Armstrong serving as MC. For February we saw images and heard accompanying descriptions from Barbara Thompson and Pam Walker explaining their involvement in the Civil Rights Pilgrimage trip to Alabama with Reverend Joan Javier-Duval. We traveled via amazing photos with Leslie Parr, Stuart and Donna Russo-Savage to East Africa for our March

meeting. In April we learned much about managing one's retirement accounts from Ellie Stubbs, a financial advisor with Ameriprise Investments. Our May meeting will be a more in-depth talk by Rev. Joan about her Philippine pilgrimage to discover more about her heritage and the role of UU churches there. We will end our year with a June picnic gathering. At least 15-25 people attended our meetings each month.

In addition to social gatherings with educational aspects, the Women's Alliance supports UCM and local non-profits through a few key fundraising efforts. We donated \$1,000 to the UCM Flood Relief fund. Our fall rummage sale raised \$2031, of which half goes to the General Fund. We netted \$619 from the Holiday Fair pecan sales and added that to the Fair's total profit. The 2nd Sunday Soup Sales netted \$384 which will be donated to the Montpelier Food Pantry. We plan to donate \$300 to a few other local non-profits. We also gifted each staff member a small "honorarium" at Christmastime. We will hold a May rummage sale, also.

This year's officers are: Sandal Cate, president; Jane Osgatharp, vice president; Betty McKinnell, secretary; Abby Colihan, treasurer; Fran Krushenick, corresponding secretary. Our program committee includes Barbara Thompson, Ginnie Humphreys and Sarah Franklin. Janet Poeton, former president, assists in a variety of ways. Many others, including Nancy Schulz, Anne Ferguson and Elaine Ball, lend helping hands in all our annual efforts for which we are greatly appreciative.

All are welcome to attend our monthly meetings, usually held on the 1st Tuesday of the month at 5:00. You do not need to join us officially to attend, though only dues paying members may vote on critical items. We do hope you will join in if you haven't in the past. Please check the weekly UCM e-news for details about our gatherings.

Submitted by Sandal Cate, President, Women's Alliance

Worship and Arts Committee Annual Report

Members: Betty Roy, chair, Sarah Franklin, Jim Phinney, Alana Phinney, Case Phinney, Jen Roberts, Pat Carstensen, Rev. Joan Javier-Duval, Minister, Donia Prince, Music

Director, Sally Armstrong, Interim Director of Spiritual Exploration (Some members participated for only part of the church year.)

Our Mission Statement: The Worship and Arts Committee is the steward of the Sunday service. In collaboration with the minister, music director and interim director of spiritual exploration, we strive to ensure that elements of the service -- music, meditation and prayer, joys and concerns, readings, announcements, the sermon - - nurture each person's spiritual journey. The committee is responsible for making sure that the pulpit is full on Sundays when the minister is away, whether by guests or with special services led by members of the church. We coordinate service elements such as candles, and multimedia offerings with a dedicated budget.

The Summer Meditation services met in the vestry for a few weeks until the flood closed our building. The Beth Jacob Synagogue, Montpelier, generously offered space for the meetings. Meditations continued in that comfortable space until the church year began. A quote for reflection was offered for each meeting and attendees appreciated the discussions and the opportunity for sharing.

The Committee supported the coordination of the first five services of the church year which were held at the North Branch Nature Center since our building was closed. During Joan's sabbatical Rev. Mellen Kennedy led four Sunday services and the Christmas Eve candlelight service and the Committee gave assistance for those services.

The Committee arranged guest speakers for Sundays throughout the year - Randy Kritkausky, Ginny Sassaman, Simon DeVoil, Johanna Nichols, Rev. Debbie Ingram and Peter Thoms. There were other special services planned by members of the Committee. December's Mystery Theme included a service of readings and movement exploration. Betty Roy and Leah Greenberg created and led a service titled Holding Space for the In-betweens on December 31st - reflecting on the end of the year. In honor of Poetry Month congregants were invited to share original poems and the Committee facilitated an inspiring service of poetry sharing. Additionally, included in this

year's services - there was a pulpit swap between Rev. Joan and Rev. Karen Johnston, minister at the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington.

Beth Damon continued her work with the Committee to provide Sunday flower arrangements offering the beauty of nature's gifts.

The Committee appreciates the robust Production Team which supported worship services throughout the year to consistently make the livestream possible.

This church year included the To Say Their Names service of remembrance and 1 new member Sunday. There will also be memorial services - one for Roger Ormiston on May 3rd and one for Colin Tait on May 12th

Submitted by Pat Carstensen