

# CrossCurrents

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH AT WASHINGTON CROSSING

February 2026



**The  
POWER  
of your  
PLEDGE**

To nourish  
your spirit

**UUCWC feeds your spirit through worship, Chalice Circles and much more. Harness the power with your pledge of support.**

## Gather the Spirit, Harness the Power of your Pledge

*By Robert Alan Bell, Stewardship Committee*

Sunday, February 8, was a day when, at UUCWC, we gathered the spirit and harnessed its power. We hope you were there, virtually or in person.

It was the day we kicked off our annual pledge campaign for the 12 months beginning July 1 of this year, the day our congregation commits the resources to power our mission to celebrate life, create community, and change the world.

### The Power of Your Pledge

We want so much from our church: an assistant minister and a larger full-time staff to meet our expanding needs and ambitions. We want to attract more people and increase our capacity to serve them. We want to safely and securely open our building to the community, which would require staff and volunteer time we don't currently have.

We want all these things, but we can only have them with your help. In some faith traditions, money comes from a central authority. In others, members are told what to donate. In our faith, it is up to you. The uncertainty and distress of these times can make you hesitate, but they are also the times when we need the church more than ever – and so do those who depend on us for help.

### Three Easy Ways to Pledge

1. You can pledge online at our website. Go to the Giving menu and select Annual Pledge Drive. The page includes a form you can fill out and submit with a single click. There's also a link to our new Realm membership system. If you're comfortable with online giving, you can post your pledge there and sign up for automatic payments from your checking account or credit card.
2. If you prefer paper, use the flyers available at our front door. Fill out the form on the back and place it in the pledge box.
3. You can download and print a paper form from the Annual Pledge Drive page or email [stewardship@uucwc.org](mailto:stewardship@uucwc.org) with any questions or to share your plans.

Your pledge, combined with others', has the power to fulfill our wants. It has the power to build our capacity to serve and become the church we dream we can be.

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## Mid-Year Board Update

*By Bob Alt, on behalf of the UUCWC Board*

As we're just over halfway through our fiscal year, it's a good time to reflect on how we're progressing toward the goals we set earlier this year. Each year, the Board sets goals aligned with UUCWC's vision, mission, and values. If you'd like a reminder of our vision and mission, you can find them here:

### UUCWC Vision and Mission

Our simplified mission statement is Create Community, Celebrate Life, Change the World.

Our goals for the year are:

#### **Create Community**

- We offer creative, meaningful ways to participate in community life, strengthened by mutual care, honest communication, and a spirit of covenantal connection that unites us all.
- We actively welcome and are hospitable, while embracing learning and growth to become a truly inclusive community.
- We build multigenerational, multicultural, in-person and online communities; they are tightly woven together and with the wider whole

#### **Celebrate Life**

- Each of us shares and lives out our Unitarian Universalist identity every day. Together, we grow spiritually as individuals and as a congregation.

#### **Change the World**

- We actively engage with the larger community as partners, collaborators, and advocates for justice, guided by their needs and voices.

We have a financial plan for the next 1-3 years to ensure financial stability through realistic goals. So, how are we doing? Our Board, staff, committees, and ministries have been hard at work advancing toward our goals. We won't be able to list everything here, but we'll highlight some of the accomplishments to date.

First, we like to acknowledge the amazing work that Reverend Kim, Reverend Lisa, and the staff have been doing in leading UUCWC. They've shown leadership,

resilience, and flexibility in working through the retirement of Robin Pugh, the Director of Congregational Life, whose position was not backfilled. This has resulted in a shift in roles and responsibilities and, ultimately, incremental work for the staff and many volunteers. However, they continue to tend to the health of our congregation, meet the needs of our members, lead programs, and manage the church's operations.

These include the Pathways program, Tending the Flame parent group, searching for an assistant minister, managing our Sunday hosts, leading an online vigil for the 225 UU clergy who went to Minneapolis to respond to ICE violence, launching a new Caring Cohort for adults caregivers of aging parents, providing memorial services, leading Sunday services, providing activism training, rolling out the new Realm platform, supporting the Stewardship campaign, engaging in committees (e.g., Aesthetics, Building Safety, Congregational Engagement, Facilities), and ensuring our driveways are plowed. This is a long list, and not nearly complete, but it is provided intentionally to give a glimpse into the broad roles our staff plays. Please take a moment to thank them for their amazing work!

### **Progress Creating Community Goals**

Overall, we've taken efforts to strengthen the UUCWC community, both online and offline.

- Congregational Engagement (Pam Shadzik, Martha Bell) and the team have relentlessly pursued ways to make our community more welcoming. They've paired new members with long-term members, implemented lanyards and hosts to identify and welcome visitors, created a visitor/new member coffee hour, and created a Buddy Program to help new volunteers learn our programs faster (started the first Food Ministry).
- Rev. Kim is leading Pathways, a four-session conversation about faith, UUism, and UUCWC. We have 17 potential new members and one long-term member participating.
- Rev. Lisa has been hosting 20/30s luncheons to build community among our younger members.
- The Caring/Pastoral Care Committee (Pat Braender, Linda Vogt) has provided assistance 31 times to congregants in need of meals and rides.
- The Right Relations Committee (Marianne Alt, Mike Gianella) will initiate a church-wide discussion about adopting a new congregational covenant that reflects our values to strengthen our community.

### **Celebrating Life**

A summary of some of the activities we've done to help us grow spiritually as individuals and as a congregation includes the following:

- Rev. Lisa continues to host Vespers monthly, offering an opportunity to experience a different kind of worship and to nurture your spirit through music, poetry, and candlelight.
- Worship Committee (Anne Godlasky) trained three new members of the worship team—Jo Wiedman, Colin Robinson, and Susan Mitchell.
- We've incorporated virtual attendee chalice lighting into services.
- We've implemented ongoing discussions after the service to continue the dialogue from the sermon.

### **Changing the World**

Overall, we're broadening our presence in our surrounding communities; strengthening our image as a congregation with strong, dependable values; and increasing the bonds within our UUCWC community.

- We hosted the Trans Day of Remembrance again this year.
- Community Outreach Fund (Holly Bussey) has distributed almost \$10k to support social justice ministries and local food charities, when SNAP funding was cut off, the UU Disaster Relief, and Trenton Microloan Collaborative.
- The Food Ministry (Mike Muccioli, Jaqueline Thomas) held eight food drives, collecting more than 2,800 items to address food insecurity in Mercer and Bucks counties. The Food Ministry also cooked and delivered 13 turkeys for the Interfaith Food Alliance in Morrisville.
- Volunteers tutored students and provided hot meals through the Homefront program.
- Community Action (Jenny Ciccolini) has disseminated important information via email about LGBTQ+ social justice action opportunities.
- Earth & Climate Ministry (Barbara Drew, Al Johnson, Leslie McGeorge) harvested our garden and donated fresh produce to HomeFront, Rolling Hills Harvest, and TASK.

## Financial Health

Our final goal is to create a financial plan for the next 1-3 years to ensure financial stability through realistic goals. The Board sponsored a Financial Health Task Force to assist with this work. This task force provided specific recommendations, which the Board is now assessing and incorporating into the 2026/2027 budget, as well as guidance on establishing a 3-year financial plan. Additionally:

- Endowment (David Schumann) rewrote the bylaws and the way Endowment is administered. Endowment support helped us add chancel accessibility (ramps/railings) and expand the chancel, remodel the downstairs bathroom, replace the water heater, and update the mechanical room to better support maintenance tasks.
- The Auction Team (Barbara Drew) is hard at work planning for Auction 2026, including a kickoff party on Friday, May 1.
- Stewardship (Jane Root, Rab Bell) has kicked off the stewardship campaign.

Lastly, let us summarize the areas we'll focus on for the remainder of the year. They include:

- Sponsoring a Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force, and using that work to review and use to help us create an updated strategic plan.
- Initiating work on a comprehensive communications plan.
- Restarting a committee on digital safety.
- Continuing to find ways to improve our engagement with our online community and to be even more inclusive and accessible.
- An initiative by Racial Justice Ministry (Dan Tuft, Kelly Benson) to get a Reparations Speaker Series off the ground.

The congregation has accomplished a lot so far this year. I'm proud to be part of this amazing community and look forward to the great work that will continue. Thank you to the staff, the leaders of our committees and ministries, and the volunteers who help make this possible!

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# BUDGET PLANNING

## Mid-Year Financial Update and Budget Outlook

*By Sandee Steinberg, Chair, Finance Committee*

We are more than halfway through the 2025–2026 fiscal year, and I'd like to share an update on the church's finances and our budget process.

We began planning the 2026–2027 budget in November by asking committees, ministries, and staff for projected expenses. A major component is staff compensation. The Personnel Committee provided those figures using a 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment based on the Social Security Administration's COLA. We also projected church income based on recent trends.

In January, we presented a draft budget to the board so they could work with Stewardship to set a goal for the annual pledge drive. The proposed budget includes funding for a half-time assistant minister to replace Lisa when she leaves—recognizing that no one can truly replace her. The initial draft showed a deficit of more than \$70,000, and the board asked us to reduce that to \$50,000.

To do so, we recommended lowering our UUA contribution, reducing transfers to the Facilities Reserve, and retaining all auction proceeds rather than sharing a portion with an outside charity. We are now waiting for final pledge totals, which will help determine next year's budget. Thank you to everyone who has pledged; every contribution helps us meet our church's goals.

We will begin the final budget review in April, once stewardship results are complete. At that point, we will know whether additional adjustments are needed before presenting a final draft to the board. In May, after board approval, we will share the detailed budget with the congregation and follow up with a high-level version for a vote at the annual meeting.

Questions or comments are always welcome at [finance@uucwc.org](mailto:finance@uucwc.org). We value your feedback, and broad participation helps ensure the budget reflects the congregation's priorities.

# UUWorld

## UUCWC Featured in *UU World*

*By Holly Bussey*

The most recent issue of *UU World* features an interview with Rev Kim and Dan Tuft discussing the work of the Community Outreach Fund Ministry and the developing relationship between UUCWC and the Trenton Microloan Collaborative. See full article [here](#).

For more information on the Community Outreach Fund Ministry and its programs, contact [faithfunding@uucwc.org](mailto:faithfunding@uucwc.org).

Be a part of changing the world!

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A dark blue background with a white spotlight at the top center, casting a cone of light down to a circular glow on the floor. The text is centered within the spotlight.

# CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

## Spotlight on Right Relations

*By Jennifer Rehbein and Marianne Alt*

Our faith is covenantal. What binds us together is not a set of dogmatic beliefs but rather a living, breathing covenant. Here at UUCWC, our Covenant of Right Relations is our agreement about how we want to be with one another when we are together.

Creating a beloved community requires intention and practice. Our covenants articulate our intention, but how do we live that practice? When all is going well, and every member, friend, and participant is true to our shared covenant, things go smoothly. Everyone feels seen, heard, and valued, and they belong. This is the aspiration, but we are, after all, human.

Because we are human, we will sometimes find ourselves frustrated with one another, feeling misunderstood or unseen, or even in deep disagreement. Sometimes we hurt one another. Sometimes we are the ones who have caused harm, and we need support and guidance to make amends. At those times, our covenant remains and is the container that holds our relationship. Conflict and disagreement can be navigated safely within the boundaries of that container.

Our community is stronger and healthier when we have spaces to explore and resolve our conflicts in ways that honor the dignity of each of us. The Right Relations Committee is an intentional presence within the congregation, available to all when such space is needed.

The Right Relations Committee is committed to our ongoing learning about how to communicate clearly and authentically, act responsibly, show deep respect for each person's unique experiences, and meet one another's hurts and vulnerabilities with compassion. Our intention is to be a resource for the whole congregation, helping all of us learn together how to do so.

The UUA asks us to "Imagine a spiritually mature, culturally competent, humble, non-anxious Unitarian Universalism where conflict is a faith formation opportunity and a normal part of religious community and the human journey." It is the responsibility of each congregant, friend, and participant to recognize conflict as natural and as an opportunity for deeper connection.

If you have had an interaction with a fellow member that left you feeling uneasy or uncomfortable, you can reach out to a member of Right Relations. If your small group has disagreements that aren't getting resolved, or if your group is beginning challenging work and you want to create a covenant, Right Relations is here for you. If you have concerns about any aspect of our life together here at UUCWC, Right Relations is ready to listen. For those times and for all the other times when we need support to be our best selves, we have Right Relations to help us return to our covenant and live into our commitments.

The current members of Right Relations are Marianne Alt, Mike Gianella, Jennifer Rehbein, and Scott Drew. You can speak with any of us in person on a Sunday or reach out by email at [rrc@uucwc.org](mailto:rrc@uucwc.org).



*Above: Community Outreach Fund representatives presented \$6,000 to Trenton Microloan Collaborative on February 15, 2026.*

# Spotlight on the Community Outreach Fund Ministry

*By Holly Bussey, Community Outreach Fund*

As reported in a recent article, this group of caring volunteers determines how 50% of UUCWC's Sunday plate collection is distributed.

The Community Outreach Fund ministry, one of several social action ministries under UUCWC's Council for Faith in Action, supports organizations beyond our walls. Members are eager to learn about the good work of local nonprofits and value both the camaraderie within the group and the partnerships they build with community organizations. Their shared passion is making a difference as they research potential grant recipients, meet with them, and thoughtfully decide how funds are awarded.

## **Why Participate?**

This ministry offers a meaningful way to learn about organizations in the wider community and connect directly with them. Participants bring a range of experience—from nonprofit work to marketing to a strong commitment to justice—and engage with one another and community partners through presentations, events, and conversations on effective collaboration. Recently, the ministry hosted the Trenton Microloan Cooperative at UUCWC and met with local groups, including Snipes Farm and Education Center and the Hopewell Food Bank, to better understand their needs and opportunities.

## **How Can You Get Involved?**

You can join the ministry or support individual projects as they arise. Opportunities include taking notes, contacting organizations to learn more about their work, arranging presentations, attending community benefits (at no cost), building relationships with local partners, and exploring ways UUCWC can deepen connections beyond financial support.

## **More About the Ministry**

Formerly known as FEFT, the ministry was recently renamed the Community Outreach Fund. Members meet every other month and stay in touch between meetings to keep projects moving. To learn more, contact [faithfunding@uucwc.org](mailto:faithfunding@uucwc.org)

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## Food Ministry Update

*By Christine Piatek on Behalf of the Food Ministry*

Imagine a world where everyone had enough to eat, did not go to sleep at night with hunger pangs, could afford the weekly grocery bill for themselves and their families, and could splurge on treats now and again, something many of us consider a second thought. Imagine a world that did not need food pantries and nonprofits to help people make ends meet. Sadly, that is not the world we live in. It is a dream to dream, a hope to hope; perhaps we can get there in our youngest children's lifetimes.

In the meantime, we continue to do our part here at UUCWC. With financial support from the weekly plate and the Community Outreach Fund, the Food Ministry uses its budget to provide support to our community. The February 8th chili fundraiser to benefit the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) was one such effort. Through the generous donations of members and friends, the Food Ministry provided ninety bowls of chili and muffins for lunch and raised \$529, all of which goes to TASK. Over five Sundays in November, the congregation donated more than 1,399 food items valued at \$3,723 to five food pantries in Mercer and Bucks counties. We collected an additional \$933 in food items on the day of Robin's retirement.



Another new project brought to UUCWC and the Food Ministry involves cooking turkeys for the Interfaith Food Alliance (IFA) in Morrisville. UUCWC member Susan Vigilante enlisted the Food Ministry to cook turkeys donated to IFA, which does not have a Serv-Safe commercial kitchen to handle this work. Susan piloted this project in the kitchen on her own a few months ago, and on January 23rd, Mike Muccioli and Jackie Thomas assisted in cooking thirteen turkeys and packaging them. Marcia Wittmann and Ron Iannacone delivered the packages to IFA for distribution to families in need. This project will be repeated as needed.

Food Ministry members will travel to the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton on February 24th to share a pizza dinner with Pastora Karen Hernandez-

Grenzen and an equal number of church congregants. Gathering for dinner at Westminster allows us to deepen our connection to the Trenton community as we explore additional ways to provide support.

Ongoing projects include preparing and delivering a monthly meal to Luther Arms Senior Housing in Trenton, a monthly hot meal (September – June) for students and tutors in UUCWC's Tutoring Program, and monthly Sandwich Supper Bags (October – June) for students in HomeFront's Joys, Hopes and Dreams Program.

To learn more about the Food Ministry, email us at [foodministry@uucwc.org](mailto:foodministry@uucwc.org).



## Top 10 Reasons to Participate in UUCWC's 2026 Auction

*By Barbara Drew, Co-Chair, Auction Committee*

The Auction Committee invites you to explore the many reasons to contribute an item, event, service, craft, or gift card to support our community, and to join the fun by bidding and purchasing during the auction. Here are our Top 10 reasons to participate in the Auction and share our joy!

10. Auction offerings are a great way to get to know others and stay connected through small gatherings, meals, workshops, outings, and more.
9. It is "better to give than to receive." Through the spring auction, you can do both! Consider offering a service or a specialty item, and submit your Contribution form by Monday, March 30.
8. Auction proceeds support the annual operating budget.

7. The Auction offers opportunities to learn or hone new skills and explore new interests, ranging from creative crafts to wellness activities and games.
6. You can support local businesses by making your auction contribution with a gift card, perhaps from a favorite restaurant or local shop.
5. The Auction features many great meals and custom-prepared specialty foods, ranging from themed dinners to homemade treats.
4. There are bargains! The auction offers something for everyone across every price range. Some items and events are fixed price; others are open to competitive bidding.
3. Check off your bucket list: the Auction can open the door to cultural experiences you've always wanted to try, such as visiting local attractions, museums, or attending special events. Where would you like to go?
2. You make a difference by participating—whether as a donor, bidder, or purchaser. Last year's auction raised nearly \$40,000. We need your help to make this year just as successful, and we hope you'll join us.
1. The Auction is fun! Bidding and purchasing are convenient and accessible through our online auction, running Saturday, May 2, at 9:00 a.m., through Saturday, May 9, at 9:00 p.m.

For more information, contact the Auction Team, including Co-Chairs Barbara Drew, Lori O'Neil, Jayme Trott, and Marcia Wittmann, at [auction@uucwc.org](mailto:auction@uucwc.org)—we're happy to help! You can also find ideas and details on the church website's Giving tab, on the [Auction](#) page.



## Voices From UUCWC: AI Means Freedom

*By Mike Wilson*

Do we want to make followers or seekers with the creativity to help build a more prosperous world?

Let's begin by asking what educational freedom looks like and why so much of what we call schooling can feel like its opposite.

Grades, rigid classroom management, top-down curricula, age-based tracking, and the march toward graduation can function less as supports for learning and more as systems of control. They push students through predetermined hoops in the name of "achievement." The signs are easy to spot: children counting the days until summer, wishing they were anywhere but at school, and imagining real life beginning only after formal education ends. College students, too, often "learn" mainly to pass exams and earn letter grades rather than to understand, explore, or grow.

This is not freedom. It can become a form of educational oppression rooted in constant extrinsic pressure from those positioned above learners—teachers, professors, administrators, institutions, and ultimately the state. Students may be trained to comply, perform on demand, and respond to authority rather than listen to their own curiosity, judgment, and capacity to learn. In that way, schooling can quietly condition them for top-down power structures.

Now consider AI and the possibility it offers of reversing this pattern.

We already know that intrinsically motivated learning is deeper, more durable, and more meaningful than learning imposed from above. When learning aligns with a student's interests, identity, and sense of purpose, it becomes not only more enjoyable but also far more lasting. It sparks energy rather than resistance and opens the future to greater freedom.

Yet the dominant impulse has been to treat AI as a threat, to restrict it, and to fold it back into the same extrinsic system, driven by fears of cheating and a desire for control. That, I believe, is a mistake.

Instead, AI can expand educational freedom. It can help students define goals, set their own measures of success, and design pathways that reflect who they are and whom they want to become. AI is not a passing trend; it is part of the future that students will inhabit. Rather than shielding them from it, education should help them learn to live with it—how to think alongside it, question it, and use it to become lifelong learners in a changing world.

In this vision, teachers shift roles. They become guides and sense-makers, helping students navigate vast landscapes of knowledge, uncover unrealized strengths, and intentionally develop their talents. The goal is no longer mere compliance but self-understanding.

Students become captains of their own learning. Their freedom grows as their choices expand and they learn to make them wisely. When learners understand their power and how to wield it, democracy benefits. Education no longer trains obedience; it cultivates agency, participation, and the skills needed to help shape our shared future.

When learners understand their power and how to wield it, democracy benefits.

Education no longer trains obedience to authority; instead, it cultivates agency, participation, and the skills to shape a shared future.



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