

# ANNUAL REPORT



RIVER ROAD  
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATION  
2023

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# Senior Minister's Opening Report

Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd



“These are the days that have been given to us;

Let us rejoice and be glad in them.

These are the days of our lives;

Let us live them well in love and service.

These are the days of mystery and wonder; let us cherish and celebrate them in  
gratitude together.

These are the days that have been given to us;

Let us make of them stories worth telling to those who come after us.”

- Rev. Dr. Bill Murry

To River Road’s Members, Friends, and Partners in Ministry,

This has been a year of rebuilding and re-imagining for River Road, and not just in the now-familiar late pandemic sense. After years of mostly just holding it all together, we’re leaning out toward the future of both our congregation and progressive religion itself. From the new ways we have found to make use of our building to the strategic

planning process we've just completed, we're not thinking merely in terms of what the congregation is, but what it is becoming over the span of the years ahead of us.

On the immediate level here at River Road, we are profoundly grateful to see significant membership growth for the first time since the pandemic began. Folks are more disconnected now than ever before. Because of this, they're also yearning for what it is we have to offer. A community. A sense of place. A container for spiritual depth. A chance to make meaning and take action in the presence of great injustice. We have always been those things for each other, and even as our models of leadership change and the divisiveness of the world itself makes institutions feel a bit shaky on their feet, we keep returning to those foundational objectives.

As you'll see in the report below, and in the various reports throughout this document, our congregation remains on very strong footing, with some forthright plans in place to address the aspects of our shared ministry that could use some shoring-up.

And - as the poet Bob Dylan told us - the times, they are a changin'. It's safe to say that the financial underpinning of most congregations and nonprofits are in significant flux as generational changes impact philanthropy across the board. Leadership identification and committee structures are straining under the weight of organizational frameworks that might have served previous generations better than they will serve the unfolding future. We aren't always sure how to balance community cohesion and the difficult conversations that arise through substantive disagreements.

All of these issues have already begun to emerge in this congregation year and will continue to emerge in the coming years. But, given the strength of our congregation and the diligent effort of our leaders, I have every faith we'll rise to meet them.



## Worship and Celebration



We started off this congregational year with a commitment to re-imagine our once-monthly multigenerational services. And so, in September, we invented Spirit Sunday - when Rev. Amanda set altars around the sanctuary with tangible activities for people of all ages to engage with as an integral part of the service. We've tried so many models of multigenerational worship over the years - so far, Spirit Sunday has felt like an incredible gift - a time of shared play and embodied contemplation to offset the depth of reflection shared in our traditional services.

We also set out to put more of our liturgical energy into services that explored aspects of our Earth Ministry/Green Sanctuary commitments. Starting in the fall, we named this a "year of reset," with programs, services, and initiatives focused on the new beginnings and brave choices possible when we operate with eco-consciousness. It all culminated in a very successful Capital Area Climate Convocation right here at River Road in May.

We've been profoundly grateful this year to continue working with our amazing volunteer tech crew for services and events, joined ably by staff members Danny Turner and Ausjai Davis.

## Building



We did it! After a deeply thoughtful process involving the Board, the Earth Ministry, and a number of key leaders including Page Lansdale, Bruce Davis, and Nick Kamphaus, we've got solar panels! They're beautiful, and the timing aligned perfectly with our official re-accreditation as a Green Sanctuary.

The Building Committee and Finance Committee have worked together this year to prioritize projects both in the near and longer term. For the coming months we'll move from the roof to the floors, knowing that different levels of flooring repair are significantly overdue - from new surfaces in the fireside hallway and bridge to a full scale refinishing of the sanctuary floor. While the schedule is not quite clear yet, we may well be out of the sanctuary for a Sunday or two during the summer to facilitate that work.

## Administration, Finance, and Staffing



What a team we are. I continue to believe that this staff team is just about the best in the business, and our sense of cohesion and collaboration is something to behold.

Coming out of peak pandemic days, several of our staff members were more than ready to use their much-deserved sabbatical leave, and we were grateful to make space for Beth to take some time away over the winter and to support Rev. Amanda's rest and renewal this spring and summer from April through the end of July.

Note that Rev. Amanda has not submitted a report for this year, based solely on her sabbatical schedule. She did work with a variety of teams and committees to keep our programs and worship services running smoothly, and has recently announced her candidacy for the Board of our shared Unitarian Universalist Association. Quite an honor!

As you'll see in the report from the Finance Committee and Treasurer, River Road's finances remain strong even as we move toward a second consecutive year of deficit budgeting. As we approach the end of this FY, we've been able to manage costs and expand rentals enough to significantly decrease the deficit we predicted this time last

year. All of that is due to some extraordinary labor from both the Finance Committee and key staff including Ana Lim, Jessie Delaplaine, and Susan Eckert. As of early May, with two busy months left to go in the congregational year, we were already well over 100% of our budgeted expectation for rental income in the building. It's safe to say we really can't rent this place much more than we currently are.

This year we are seeing a solid number of new pledges from new members, but it does seem like a number of people are shifting away from annual pledging as such and toward one-time non-pledged giving. That does make it difficult for us to plan in the traditional ways for congregational expenses over time and the foundational pledging and giving numbers remain in a time of great flux. We anticipate further reductions in spending at some point in the next eighteen months in order to keep ourselves from running year-over-year deficits in the future.

Administratively, you can see evidence of a very hard-working board just about anywhere you glance here at River Road this year. From the full strategic plan to the deeply laborious efforts to address major bylaws questions at this year's Annual Meeting, this Board has been putting in the time at least as much as any leadership team I've worked with before. If you have a moment to be gracious to a Board member, please do.

We should also take a moment to celebrate Clif Hardin and the River Road music program. At the conclusion of this spring, Clif will have officially been with us for 40 years of service. We'll be honoring him at a party in October, but also sharing the remarkable twin achievements of his composition's performance at Carnegie Hall on Memorial Day and his selection as director of the General Assembly choir.



## Collaboration and Potomac Partnership



We made the UU World Magazine! It really was quite fabulous to see the Potomac Partnership congregations highlighted by the UUA as a model of the kinds of cross-cutting collaboration that can pave a constructive way forward as congregations continue to change.

The partnership expanded somewhat this year to include the UU Congregation of Arlington, Virginia, and some collaboration with All Souls Church in the District. Arlington is working with River Road specifically on issues of leadership development and training.

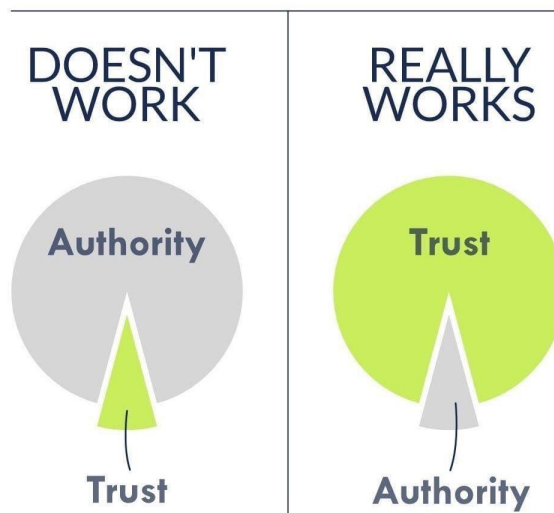
During the month of July we'll have a somewhat more pared-down version of our multi-congregation summer worship series, Preaching Along the Potomac, and in the fall we'll earnestly begin conversations about the ways in which we could manage costs across all three congregations through some targeted staff and ministry sharing.

The Climate Convocation in May was also an example of a rich collaboration with Unitarian Universalists from across the national capital region. That partnership is just at the beginning stages, but promises to help focus and amplify our efforts in the years

to come. Take a moment to thank Heidi Mordhorst and Walter Weiss for their remarkable efforts to build this collaboration.

## Strategic Planning and Board Collaboration

### HOW LEADERSHIP



After two years of feedback and relationship-building across the congregation and among our partners in ministry, the Board voted to affirm our new five-year strategic plan at their May meeting. I've had the good fortune of co-chairing that process with Lisa Rubenstein, our Board Vice-Chair, throughout this congregational year. Ably assisted (and organized!) by our Board Chair Jon Kerner, I truly believe that what we've come up with is a roadmap that can guide our choices as we move forward together.

You'll see more about the Strategic Plan itself in Lisa and I's presentation at the Annual Meeting, so I'll simply say that it focuses a great deal on lay leadership development, building connections for all ages and the simple (yet sometimes elusive) joy of having fun together in community. The pandemic stretched our connections awfully thin in some areas. Together, we'll set about continuing to re-weave them.

This Board has also labored this year to ensure that their deliberations are not opaque to the congregation as a whole. They've taken pains to communicate that meetings are open to those who would like to speak on an issue that matters to them or attend all Board work that is not in executive session.

You've also seen the Board members themselves introducing each month's spiritual theme in our services, reminding us not only who our Board members are, but that the management of River Road's affairs is in fact spiritual work. In the middle of all that, I'd like to formally thank my great collaborator, Board Chair Jon Kerner, for his diligence and care as we've made our way through so many challenges and a-ha moments as colleagues in this ministry we share.

Together, we're trying to build a leadership model that allows the Board to operate in the best interests of the congregation at large while balancing a variety of concerns and viewpoints. Each successive River Road Board is, after all, a body of leaders who represent the congregation, having been elected by the congregation. We endow our Board leaders with a great deal of responsibility that is upheld not by any inherent authority they have above the rest of us, but by the trust we choose to place in them and in each other.



On the horizon and final thoughts - as you can see, it's been an intense year here at River Road for many of us, myself included. We've focused deeply on our finances, administration and priority-setting. We've kept the ship afloat through the choppy waters of the last few years - now it's time to actually point that ship in the direction of our shared vision.

For my part, I remain deeply grateful to serve as the supervisor of this staff team and collaborator alongside the Board. I also have my own finger in a variety of pots at denominational and interfaith levels. I've served on the campaign team for Sofia Betancourt, our next President of the UUA, and am working with the Association to plan a large-scale Climate Revival in the spring/summer of 2024. I'm also serving as administrator and liturgist for the General Assembly Sunday service, making sure everything goes off without a hitch for Clif's choir directing duties. I work with Meadville Lombard Theological school as steering-team member for their continuing-education programs, am active in broad based community organizing, and have just been accepted into a Doctor of Ministry program that will begin in the Summer of 2024. The new book I've co-edited has been done for quite awhile and will finally be in our hands sometime in the next few months. I'm not often bored, but River Road remains at the center of it all.

We make this way forward together.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nancy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy



## From Our Board of Trustees The Year of Living Gratefully

This congregational year provided many opportunities and challenges for living gratefully within our Beloved Community. Our high-tech, hybrid services provided new and diverse visitors the opportunity to experience our thought-provoking and heart-moving Sunday services, including outstanding music programs, either in person or from the comfort of one's own home. The Board is very grateful for the exceptional work of the tech team, the music program, the religious education, the communications, administration, and building support staff, and of course, both ministers' commitment to reaching out to us all during these challenging times. As part of the Board's commitment to our spiritual health, beginning in September 2022 each Board member agreed to provide opening and closing words at Board meetings aligned with the worship theme of the month. In October 2022, Board members were also invited to share their words with the congregation during one service each month.

With respect to the pandemic challenges, our Montgomery County experience was such that, while the cases per 100k residents declined beginning in January 2023, some members continued to become infected and some have experienced and continue to experience long COVID-19 symptoms. In August 2022, Rev. Nancy shared with the Board her belief that a primary cost we had paid during the pandemic was the significant fraying of our social fabric as a community. Our folks were feeling disconnected, isolated, unable to re-up or form deep personal attachments within the community. Addressing these concerns was clearly articulated as a high priority by the over 100 members, friends, and staff who contributed their wisdom in January 2023 group dialogues helping to inform our new five-year strategic plan.<sup>1</sup>

Our COVID-19 Advisory Committee, meeting monthly through March of 2023, continued to review County COVID data and healthcare institution policies, and to mathematically model potential scenarios for moving forward towards a new normal of congregational life. Providing advice and discussing options with Rev. Nancy and the administrative staff led to our Sunday services going mask optional in February 2023. This, in turn, was accompanied by larger in-person participation in Sunday services, more members and friends seeking connections during coffee hour, and an excellent turnout, including new friends and members, at our April 2023 congregational retreat.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rruuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Board-Approved-RRUUC-Strategic-Plan-5-16.pdf>

Turning to our building and grounds, the Board is grateful to the Solar Team (including lay leaders and staff) who oversaw the completion of the installation work so that we officially went on solar power, generated from our own roof, starting January 27. Although most of the roof on the original building is utilized, the panels will produce only 60% (on average) of our energy needs. Thus, we continue to purchase additional wind power from our current energy supplier, [WGL](#). Two Q&A sessions for the congregation were scheduled in person on Sunday, February 19 after the service and virtually on Wednesday, February 22, at 7pm. Additionally, there was a training session for key building staff and the building committee after the February 19th Q&A session, which covered emergency operational procedures. The solar panel installation also contributed to our redesignation as a Green Sanctuary (kudos to the Green Sanctuary Team). Finally, the Building Committee and the Grounds Committee continued to work throughout the year to maintain and oversee repairs to our beautiful building and grounds, and to identify future needs the resources for which will depend on the Board maintaining our Capital Improvement Fund.

In terms of our finances, despite having budgeted a \$155k estimated deficit for this congregational year, through the careful budget work of Rev. Nancy and the administrative and program staff, monitoring and minimizing expenses, while at the same time maximizing rental income (as well as the lay leadership of the Board-chartered Finance, Financial Stewardship, and Endowment Committees), we are looking at an operating deficit as low as \$35K this year. In addition, we have substantial financial reserves that have remained untouched during the pandemic years, which can help cover any deficit this year and potentially next year. The Board is very grateful for the success of our staff and lay leadership bringing us out of the height of the pandemic in such a strong financial position. However, the Board also recognizes the challenges that lie ahead, in that future multi year budget deficits are not sustainable. The Board will be working closely with Rev. Nancy and the budget team in future years to determine what expenses (including staff expenses) may need to be reduced to sustain our operations. In that regard, if these outstanding program operations are to continue to grow and thrive, new lay leaders will need to step up to take on responsibilities that a potentially smaller staff can no longer manage. The Board is also grateful for the opportunity we have had to meet and build relationships with the Boards of the Cedar Lane and Fairfax UU congregations. Exploring how we might be able to share staff and lay leadership resources in the future, through the Potomac Partnership, provides innovative opportunities for sustaining our Beloved Community.

The year also brought forth a new chance to reexamine our commitment to justice. While our environmental justice, racial justice, and social justice program committees,

ministries, and teams continue to engage us in the work of making the world a better place, the Board-appointed Bylaws Committee began a second year of discernment and deliberation focused specifically on two bylaws that speak to our congregation's commitment to justice: 1) When and how we as a congregation take a public position on issues of a social or political nature (bylaw 2.10); and 2) the Social Justice Council (bylaw 6.1). The Board is grateful for the work of the committee, the members of the social justice committees, ministries, and task forces who provided feedback, and for the congregants who came forward to share their views during the two May bylaw town halls. The Board voted on May 16 to provide the congregation, at our June 4 Annual Meeting, the opportunity to consider whether to retain these two bylaws, as written, or to amend them. It should be noted, that nothing in our current bylaws, nor the proposed amendments, limits the freedom of the pulpit or the ability of any RRUUC minister, member, committee, task force, or group to work or speak on its own behalf. In each case, individuals or groups may identify their affiliation with RRUUC, but shall not imply that they are speaking on behalf of the congregation as a whole.

Finally, the Board wants to express our gratitude for the many new friends and growing number of new members who have chosen to become part of our Beloved Community. As noted in our February 2023 congregational inventory report for UUA certification, compared with last year the number of new friends increased by nearly 10% to 759 and over 4% growth in membership increased our numbers to 509. Moreover, recent membership book signings indicate that our membership continues to grow. The Board wants to express our particular gratitude to Natalie Schall, our communications and membership staff director, who has brought a new energy and innovative approaches to reaching out to younger and culturally diverse families and individuals.

While the growth in new friends and members provides great hope for the future viability of our congregation, it also provides new challenges to some of our old ways of working and thinking. As Rev. Nancy has noted, our congregation, like many congregations of many faiths, is going through a generational shift. In her article "(How) Will Millennials Change the Church?",<sup>2</sup> Sarai Rice notes that millennials are much more comfortable with a rapid-cycle management style that substitutes "take a few risks and fail faster" for "never fail." They may attend a few meetings of a church committee to see whether they can help, but they won't stay around for a slow process and slower results. Older adults, based on their own brain behavior, may question whether any work is getting done.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/how-will-millennials-change-the-church/>

Increasingly, this generational shift is contributing to a dilemma as to whether to implement a rationalist or a “relationalist” approach to decision making processes. Rationalists believe that there exist universal truths that can be known through the process of reasoning. Whereas “relationalists” ask the question “what should I do now?” rather than stating “this is what you should do now.” Solutions are developed through connection with people rather than right thinking.<sup>3</sup> This dilemma may also be contributing, in part, to the current controversy within our congregation and the UUA concerning the proposed changes to Article II of the UUA bylaws.

Whatever the outcome of this particular dilemma, and other generational differences that may emerge in the years ahead, it will be paramount for the spiritual health and continued viability of our congregation to work towards actively listening to each other’s perspectives, searching (multi-generationally) for a common understanding and sincere appreciation for our cultural differences rather than “winning the argument.” As noted in our new five-year strategic plan, one of the three strategic priorities for the coming congregational year is to develop new opportunities for in-person and virtual connection among members and friends in our Beloved Community.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of our staff, lay leaders, members, and friends who are willing to join together in this journey of hope and ongoing renewal.

Sincerely,

Jon Kerner, Chair  
Board of Trustees

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Rational-Ethics-Or-Relational-Ethics-F34XQ3TUXYQ>



## Treasurer's Report

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023), RRUUC transitioned from significant restrictions owing to the COVID-19 pandemic to something closer to "normal" operations. In-person Sunday worship occurred, as did a full religious education program and periodic events (such as the Minority Scholarship fundraiser). Rentals resumed at a healthy pace.

While RRUUC's operations were closer to a "normal" level, it is also the case that RRUUC was projected to run a deficit this fiscal year. Happily, the deficit likely to result this fiscal year is smaller than projected in the budget, owing primarily to the staff's ability to keep certain expenses below their budgeted levels. In particular, spending on Worship, Education, and Outreach will be below the levels budgeted at the beginning of the fiscal year. Notably, the projected deficit for this fiscal year will be significantly smaller than the surplus experienced in the previous fiscal year. I can therefore report that RRUUC remains on a sound financial footing.

I provide with this Annual Report two documents: the RRUUC Balance Sheet as of March 31, 2023 (two pages); and the RRUUC statement of revenues and expenses for the fiscal year 2023 as of the end of March 2023 (two pages). A review of the Balance Sheet reveals that the two reserve accounts mandated by RRUUC's bylaws (the Operating Reserve and the Capital Reserve) are fully funded and untouched over the past fiscal year. Further, two other Board-mandated reserve accounts, the Capital Improvement Fund and the 8th Principle Fund, are also funded at healthy levels.

The statement of revenues and expenses contains detail on the sources of RRUUC's revenues during this fiscal year, and a breakdown of RRUUC's expenses this fiscal year. With regard to overall results, note that Total Revenues through March 2023 of \$856,936 are above Total Expenses through March 2023 of \$800,216. As noted above, this result can be attributed in large measure to the staff's ability to keep certain expenses below the amounts budgeted. We nonetheless expect a deficit to result for the full fiscal year, as expenses in the fourth quarter of this fiscal year are expected to exceed revenues received during the quarter.

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy Daniel, RRUUC Treasurer

River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation		
Balance Sheet as of March 31, 2023		
ASSETS		
Checking and Money Market Accounts		
Truist Operating		\$380,639
Truist Money Market		\$231,372
Sandy Spring Checking		\$68,622
Truist Checking		\$111,750
TOTAL Checking and MM Accounts		\$792,383
CDs and other investments		
Vanguard Federal MM - Operating		\$249,672
John Marshal Bank CD - Capital Reserve		\$113,842
John Marshall Bank CD - Operating Reserve		\$228,404
TOTAL CDs and other investments		\$591,918
TOTAL Endowment Fund Balance		\$1,159,518
TOTAL Johnson Fund Balance		\$120,006
Other assets		
Original Property & Equipment		\$133,578
Post 2008 Property & Equipment		\$5,260,424
TOTAL Other assets		\$5,394,002
TOTAL ASSETS		\$8,057,827

River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation	
Balance Sheet as of March 31, 2023	
LIABILITIES and NET ASSETS	
Liabilities and Withholdings	
Current Liabilities and Withholdings	\$8,260
Truist Mortgage Payable	\$243,641
TOTAL Liabilities and Withholdings	\$251,901
Board Designated Funds	
Capital Reserve	\$101,561
Operating Reserve	\$225,000
Capital Improvement Fund	\$276,113
8th Principle Fund	\$60,000
TOTAL Board Designated Funds	\$662,674
TOTAL Undesignated Net Assets	\$1,091,032
Building Net Assets	
Unrestricted Bldg Amortization Original Bldg	\$156,514
Building Renovations 2008	\$1,239,587
Building Improvements 2015	\$2,956,652
Building Roof/Gutters 2021	\$379,931
TOTAL Building Net Assets	\$4,732,684
Permanently Restricted Funds	
Endowment Fund Principal	\$560,304
Johnson Fund Principal	\$118,049
TOTAL Permanently Restricted Funds	\$678,353
Temporarily Restricted Funds	
Memorial Garden	\$24,824
Minister's Discretionary Fund	\$14,925
Endowment Fund Earnings	\$439,375
Misc. Restricted Gifts	\$18,176
TOTAL Temporarily Restricted Funds	\$497,300
TOTAL Other Restricted Funds	\$322,521
TOTAL Fund Principal and Excess Cash	-\$178,638
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$8,057,827





River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation				
Operating Revenues and Expenses Summary				
Fiscal Year 2022-23 - through March 31, 2023				
		Annual Budget	YTD Actual	% of Annual
		2022-23	(nine months)	Budget
EXPENSES				
Ministers and Program Staff		595,248	403,722	67.82%
Administrative Staff and Health Insurance		328,628	228,919	69.66%
TOTAL Staff and Health Insurance		923,876	632,641	68.48%
Worship, Education, Community Expenses		78,625	20,946	26.64%
Denominational Connections		40,000	30,000	75.00%
Admin and Communications Expenses		78,450	30,193	38.49%
Building and Grounds Expenses		123,500	76,836	62.22%
Mortgage Interest Expense		14,000	9,600	68.57%
Other expenses		0	0	
TOTAL Non-staff expenses		334,575	167,575	50.09%
TOTAL EXPENSES		1,258,451	800,216	63.59%

## Religious Education (RE) and Family Ministry July 2022 – June 2023

### Summer 2022

We offered three in person summer camps, but only one of them (social justice) had enough participants to run. Eight kids in total participated, about half were RRUUC children. Each day focused on a way to give back to our community.

In August, Beth led a group of ten youth, young adults and adults on the 8th annual Service Learning Trip to West Virginia.

Over the summer and into the early fall, we hired artist Susie Spangler to paint murals in the hallway where the elementary and preschool classes meet. She then worked with the children to add to the mural to make it their own.

### Religious Education Classes

Our blessing for backpacks and work bags kicked off the year on August 28.

On September 18, we welcomed children and youth back for in person Religious Education classes. This year we offered childcare, Spirit Play for preschoolers, K-2nd grade, 3rd-5th grade, middle school, Our Whole Lives (OWL,) and high school youth group. Growing numbers of families in the spring led to a second 3rd-5th grade group.

Mid-year, we hired Aruni Adikara to be the lead teacher in Spirit Play.

This was our first year back that was all inside and invited children and youth into the sanctuary for Prophetic Voices. We also introduced a monthly multigenerational service called Spirit Sundays.

We held teacher training sessions in September and again in February to get new teachers ready for success.

## October – June

Never wanting to miss an opportunity to give the younger children a fright, the middle schoolers created their annual Haunted House in the Fiatfalva room. A family pumpkin carving evening on Friday night and a costume parade at the conclusion of Sunday service rounded out the weekend.

In November and May, we led Child Dedication ceremonies during worship services. A total of 8 children were dedicated.

In November, many families showed up on a Saturday morning to pack groceries with the non-profit organization To Be Well Fed, founded and run by the Kiyvyra family.

From November – January, Beth Irikura took a sabbatical to work on her spiritual direction training final paper and to visit family.

RRUUC's annual Christmas pageant occurred at 4pm on Christmas eve. Before that, the holiday season kicked off with a gathering around the fire for s'mores and hot chocolate and solstice-inspired crafts. Many who attended that gathering then went inside to attend the Winter Solstice service. During RE time on the Sunday prior to Christmas, kids of all ages gathered in the Fireside room to create "gingerbread" houses, made from graham crackers, lots of cake frosting, and various candies.

In January, the high school youth group went on their Winter Retreat after missing it for several years during the pandemic.

In early February, children and adults came together after worship service and RE to complete the second of two murals that now brighten up the downstairs RE classroom hallway. Also in February, the high school youth group revived the Murder Mystery Dinner Theater. About 50 people came out to figure out whodunit. Proceeds went to the DC Abortion Fund.

At the congregational retreat in April, Beth and Laura offered activities for children and youth and their parents. At the end of the month we led a teacher appreciation moment during the April 30 worship service to recognize the many volunteers who make RE classes possible. Each volunteer received a copy of a book and all were treated to cupcakes during coffee hour.

May brought the return of the youth-led worship service including a Bridging Ceremony for two graduating seniors.

From October-March, Beth co-led an online Parents as Sexuality Educators with the Religious Educators at our Potomac Partnership congregations. We had 2 parents participate from RRUUC.

## Professional Development and other work

Laura and Beth were active participants in the local Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) chapter. Laura serves as secretary for our local chapter. Throughout the year we each participated in several training modules through the UUA. In October, we participated in the LREDA Fall Conference, Laura in person and Beth virtual.

In addition to Beth's responsibilities at RRUUC, she also serves as a Good Officer & Credentialing mentor for LREDA and is on the UU Wellspring Board. She graduated as a Spiritual Director in January.

This year Laura, along with Rev. Amanda, created a Reproductive Justice team for RRUUC. The first awareness and fundraising event planned by this group will occur in September. Laura also went through training to become a facilitator of the SACReD curriculum. SACReD (Spiritual Alliance of Communities for Reproductive Dignity) is a newly formed collaboration working to help congregations and communities of all faiths to advance the cause of Reproductive Justice.

From October – May, Laura and Robin Slaw (Director of Religious Education at UU Congregation of Columbia) ran the curriculum on Zoom for a small group of members from both congregations. Laura hopes to offer the curriculum in person at RRUUC sometime in early 2024.

## 2022-23 Photos



Social Justice Camp for kids in August



Family Pumpkin carving





Youth Group outing to Cox Farms



Community art project to symbolize change, November Spirit Sunday



An altar from a Spirit Sunday worship service



Creating gingerbread houses





Christmas Pageant crew



Putting the finishing touches on our mural



Making bird feeders at the congregational retreat

## Music at River Road

The music program at River Road from June 2022 through June 2023 has gone very well. We've been able to have regular youth choir and adult choir rehearsals throughout this time, uninterrupted by any significant spikes of COVID spread.

### Youth Choirs

All three youth choirs have had a good year. We rehearsed regularly in the sanctuary, instead of in the smaller space in rooms 7 and 9, mostly as a health precaution. All three groups sang for Sunday services throughout the year. As for numbers of singers, I think this was a bit of a rebuilding year. There were four young singers in the Chalice Lighters choir (K – 2<sup>nd</sup>), nine singers in The River Road Youth Choir (3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>), and thirteen singers in the River Road Teen Choir.

### The River Road Choir

It has been a bit of a rebuilding year for the adult choir, as well. There are some folks that never returned after the worst of the pandemic years, but we have had several new members join this year. In December, the choir sang a delightful program with music that celebrates the solstice, Hanukkah, and Christmas favorites. In January, we started our rehearsals for another performance of my Requiem. The purpose was twofold. The first purpose was simply to perform the piece at River Road on May 21. The second purpose was to prepare singers to perform the Requiem at Carnegie Hall with other singers from across the country, with Dr. Jennifer Rodgers conducting. River Road became a learning hub for singers in the Washington, DC area who wanted to get ready for Carnegie Hall, as well as singers in the area that just wanted to perform it at River Road. This was a first for me: we had close to one hundred people in the choir along with the orchestra. It was a gorgeous sound in our beautiful sanctuary. At the time of the writing of this report, the Carnegie Hall concert has not happened, but we are hopeful that that will go wonderfully, as well.

Special thanks to all the dedicated singers of our choir, and Dr. Shuai Wang, our accompanist, for all the tremendous time, effort, and musicianship it takes to provide music for worship at River Road

Special thanks also to our tech team: Dave Leonard, Marcia Leonard, Ausjai Davis, Danny Turner, and Jeff Hollingsworth, for the amazing audio and video work they continue to do, week after week. There is so much unseen work, time, ingenuity, and smarts behind all things musical that was accomplished because of their support.



Dr. Clifton Hardin  
Director of Music

## Extend the Offering FY 2022-2023

**July: To be Well Fed: \$5,512.00**

A nonprofit dedicated to fighting childhood hunger in Washington DC that partners with public schools to provide groceries for more than 150 children and families in need.

**August: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC):  
\$500.00**

UUSC is a nonprofit, nonsectarian organization advancing human rights together with an international community of grassroots partners and advocates.

**September: College Access Fund: \$1,500.00**

The College Access Fund provides scholarships to local public high school graduates with financial needs. Four-year scholarships go to qualified students selected by Racial Justice Task Force's Supporting Educational Access Pathway (SEAP) from applications submitted by Mentors, Inc. and College Bound.

**October: Partner Church Program: \$889.00**

Partner Church supports RRUUC's two partner churches in Fiatfalva, Transylvania, and Mawblang, N.E. India. Resources from abroad, including from RRUUC, have been essential in keeping the Unitarian movement alive in Transylvania, where it originated.

**November: Shepherd's Table: \$1,840.00**

A soup kitchen operated since 1983 as a cooperative interdenominational effort by 30 churches, synagogues, congregations, and other religious institutions. In addition to providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner to hungry persons and families in need,

Shepherd's Table, in cooperation with Interfaith Works, provides social services, training, counseling, medical, ophthalmological, and dental care to its clients.

**December: Beacon House Community Ministry: \$7,125.01**

Provides tutoring, mentoring, cultural, athletic, recreation and nutrition programs for at-risk children ages 5-18 who reside in the Edgewood Terrace community in Northeast Washington, DC.

**January: La Clinica del Pueblo: \$2,705.92**

A fully accredited, independent clinic in Columbia Heights, DC, that provides high quality, professional, and culturally appropriate health services to persons in the Latino community, regardless of ability to pay.

**February: UU Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD):  
\$1,106.00**

UULM-MD envisions a Maryland free of oppression and injustice, where all are guaranteed basic human and civil rights. This vision is addressed by alerting, educating, activating and facilitating a statewide UU base to advocate for legislation before the Maryland General Assembly each year.

**March: Montgomery County Partners for Animal Well-being  
(MCPAW): \$1,579.00**

MCPAW runs a weekly pet food bank for underserved residents so they can keep their pets at home and a spay/neuter foster/adoption program for community and stray cats so they can find their forever homes. MCPAW's KALM medical fund provides the funds necessary for pets who need special veterinary care that are beyond the resources of their owners.

## April: Peace of Mind, Inc.: \$2,343.00

Helps children learn skills they need to face challenges in their own lives and challenges facing our world with kindness, compassion, and courage through an innovative PK-8th grade curriculum that integrates mindfulness, neuroscience, conflict resolution and social justice.

## May: Trans Health Maryland: \$TBD

A multi-racial, multi-gender, trans-led community power building organization dedicated to Maryland's trans community. By trans folks, for trans folks.

## June Calvary Women's Services \$TBD

Supports women as they use their own strengths and skills to reach their goals. Women here form a community of support — a sisterhood — that fosters an environment where everyone can reach their highest potential. Each woman who comes through our doors has unique needs. With the right services and encouragement, they are empowered to transform their own lives.

## Action in Montgomery (AIM)

Since 2000, Action in Montgomery has built citizen power to effect change by developing leaders in congregations, public schools, and neighborhood associations to act together on issues that matter to their communities. AIM challenges people to imagine the change they can accomplish, connect individuals and organizations to multiply their power, and mobilize people to make their voices heard. AIM is non-partisan, multi-faith, multi-racial, and dedicated to making our county and state a better place to live and thrive. The People's Agenda for 2023-2025 was developed from listening to more than 1,500 people across the county.

The following are highlights of what the AIM Core Team at RRUUC accomplished during the past congregational year.

We continued our strategic collaboration with RRUUC's Earth Ministry Team (EM) to improve the environment for low-income residents. Our climate campaign will soon be statewide.

In October 2022, we participated in a Statewide action with candidates for state office, including Governor Wes Moore and Comptroller Brooke Lierman. AIM supported two state climate bills, and only one passed. We will be working (specifically in RRUUC's district) to gain support for the other.

In March 2023, more than 35 RRUUC folks attended AIM's Accountability Action during which over 600 AIM supporters reminded incumbent and newly elected County officials about their commitments to support AIM issues.

We are collaborating with our sister organizations in Howard and Anne Arundel counties regarding both education and climate issues because state funding to the counties is required.

We assisted AIM in applying for a grant to conduct a dental pilot program for uninsured residents of Hewitt Avenue. Montgomery County will provide the van if the grant application is successful.

AIM will soon be celebrating the newly renovated building of one of the Excel Beyond the Bell elementary schools, South Lake. We participated in years of effort and several actions to keep restoring South Lake to the top of the County's renovation list.



AIM and RRUUC members of AIM are intensely involved in ongoing efforts to establish the new nationwide network of local community organizing groups (of which there are now nine). This network is already working with Montgomery College to establish a curriculum about community organizing in the Political Science Program.

RRUUC members joined AIM's issue action teams regarding housing quality and stabilization for low-income residents, transit-oriented affordable housing, increased access to college funding, expanded affordable after school program, dental care, and climate justice. The AIM Core Team at RRUUC currently includes Linda Bleadingheiser, Claudia Greer, Marcia Kingman, Rob Nooter, Jim Olson, Niki Popow, Liz Purcell (chair), John Ruthrauff, and Joan Zenzen.

## Actions 4 Justice Pathway

This group works on getting out the vote and educating members on our listserv about voting and election issues, with suggested actions that members can take. For the November 2022 elections, Kathryn developed a blog for RRUUC, where we posted actions that people can take on their own, with activities like: phone/text banking, letter writing, postcard writing, or registering voters. The blog was an effort to make our project more self-directed; volunteers/concerned citizens could do things on their own time, as well as trying different methods to encourage people to vote. We linked volunteers to actions being done by not-for-profit groups nationally and locally. The blog also included voting information: where to register, where & when to vote, and related information for Maryland, Virginia, and DC. In the summer and fall of 2022, we used postcards we had on hand in four postcard actions. We obtained names, addresses, and script from the local chapter of Center for Common Ground (Reclaim Our Vote), with whom we had worked before. Volunteers picked up packets that we had put together at RRUUC and they completed the writing and mailing on their own time. It was mainly RRUUC members who participated, including some from two area retirement communities.

Submitted Ursula Scott and Kathryn Gargurevich, co-chair

## Animal Ministry

The RRUUC Animal Ministry Social Justice Team continued its mission to explore the human relationship to pets, wildlife, and livestock who share our world as a moral and religious issue; and engage in actions to bring about change at the individual, family, congregational, community, and societal levels. Activities in 2022-2023 included providing leadership in RRUUC's efforts to provide plant-based foods at congregational events, supporting animal-related congregational activities, and supporting our community partners. These activities are summarized below.

### Plant-based Foods

The Animal Ministry team coordinated and served a plant-based cookout at the April 22nd RRUUC retreat. Animal Ministry members helped organize, coordinate, and serve plant-based meals at the multi-congregational Climate Convocation at RRUUC on May 6. Animal Ministry provided vegan treats including Yonanas frozen dessert at the Anniversary Celebration for Reverend Nancy. Animal Ministry members assisted with providing vegan options at the Celebration for Green Sanctuary Recertification.



### Congregational Activities

The Animal Ministry Team helped coordinate and participated in the Animal Blessing Service. Members of the Animal Ministry Team took part in the joint meeting of the RRUUC Social Justice teams organized by Reverend Amanda. Animal Ministry members continued to promote and sell RRUUC water bottles, which reduce the use of disposable plastic and thereby help protect wildlife.

## Supporting Community Partners

Animal Ministry held tabling events after Sunday Services to collect supplies for Poplar Springs, Second Chance Wildlife Center, MCPAW, MC C3, and Worthy Dog Rescue. The Extend the Offering nominee, the Montgomery County Partners for Animal Well-being (MCPAW), submitted by the Animal Ministry team, was the beneficiary of the March 19th ETO. Also on March 19th, Animal Ministry organized a benefit concert entitled "Strands of Compassion" at RRUUC to benefit MCPAW. The concert highlighted how embracing the connections we have to the natural world and all beings can bring about transformative spiritual growth and planetary healing. Animal Ministry members participated in and coordinated the multi-congregational supply drive for Poplar Springs.



## Recognition

Last but certainly not least, Leigh Scott, the founder and leader of the Animal Ministry Team, won a well-deserved Congregational Leadership Award. Unfortunately she will be leaving RRUUC but her contributions and legacy will continue on with the members of the team she has so lovingly cultivated. We will miss her and Mark Cohen tremendously, but wish them the best in their new home and look forward to collaborating in the future.



## Auction

RRUUC's 2023 Auction Committee is reporting on an auction very much in progress! We are in the midst of soliciting donations and getting them ready for online bidding.

While we are actively seeking repeat donations from businesses, we are not looking for new ones unless they come from members. We are also not accepting "items" in this year's auction, unless custom-made and delivered directly from donor to winner. The committee and staff will not have to take on the stress of collecting, safeguarding, and distributing these things, which can be saved for the Bazaar.

The auction itself will take place wholly online, and will not end with a "live" event this year, based on the capacity of the committee. We are focusing on supporting the donation and bidding processes with Sunday after-service support and enthusiasm.

As amazing donations are flowing in, we predict another fun and successful auction that will help River Road in Growing Our Connections!

Volunteers to help with next year's auction are very welcome. Contact [auction@rruuc.org](mailto:auction@rruuc.org) to join the auction team!

Barb Geiser, ringleader

Sue Schneider, Marcia Leonard, Natalie Schall, Rita Parks, Ana Lim, Jana Kirkman



# Bazaar

The Bazaar has been an annual tradition at River Road for almost 50 years, building community and raising money for the work of our congregation. Our property is transformed by hundreds of volunteers who join together to sort and sell high quality, gently used donated goods, which are offered at great prices. Shoppers come from near and far to find bargains and treasures. As part of our Green Sanctuary commitment to the environment, we actively recycle all we can during and after the Bazaar to other organizations or appropriate centers.

On hiatus in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, the Bazaar returned in June 2022, netting over \$20,000. These proceeds were shared with our friends at Scotland AME Zion Church, just up the road, whose historic building was severely damaged due to a flood in 2019.

This year's Bazaar will return to its fall time frame on November 4, 2023. Start setting aside your high quality Silent Auction items this summer; come fall, collect and curate your "good goods" donations (clothing, household and kitchen items, art, jewelry, sporting goods, children's toys and books, linens). And then — join the fun! Organize and move donations, bake, greet, sell, cashier, help with parking and security, take down, celebrate! We invite all River Roaders, young and old, to share their talents and energy. Be a part of our amazing community of volunteers!

Bazaar Co-chairs: Barb Geiser, Lis Handley, and Jenny Sour

Email us at [bazaar@rruuc.org](mailto:bazaar@rruuc.org).



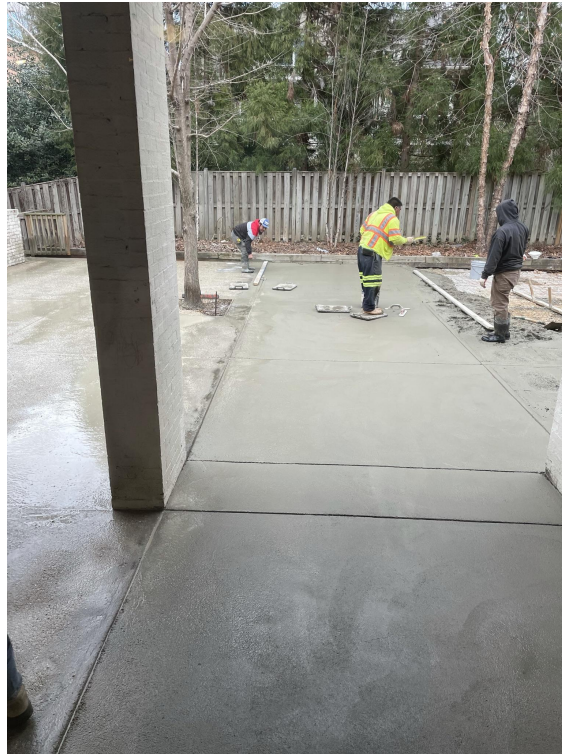
## Friday Morning Book Group

All are welcome to participate in our book discussions on the third Friday morning of the month. We met June through August 2022, and September through May (except December) 2022-2023 via Zoom; discussion of the selected book began at 10am, with time for informal chat beginning at 9:45am. Usually, the group collectively selected a fiction or nonfiction title to discuss for each month; during July and August the group decided on slightly different formats. Chosen books may reflect RRUUC's foci, but we did not limit ourselves to those foci.

Examples from 2022-2023 that are related to RRUUC's foci include *These Precious Days*; *Search*; *Between Freedom and Equality: The History of an African American Family in Washington, DC*; *Damnation Spring*; and various books by Louise Erdrich. We have about 15 members or friends who participate regularly, with a range of 8-12 participants per meeting; others participate based on the book being discussed. A list of upcoming books is posted in the eWeekly.

## Building Committee

The building committee completed several projects this year: we worked with the Green Sanctuary committee to ensure that the installation of the solar panels honors both our commitment to the environment and also our commitment to the aesthetic vision of our award-winning building. The compact florescent lights in the fellowship hall were replaced with nearly identical units featuring LEDs. The old lights contained mercury and were failing so it was time to replace them. We also replaced the more than 50-year-old concrete patio opposite the fireside room. The patio was in poor shape and Washington Gas provided partial funding due to damage to the patio from replacing a gas line.



Looking towards next year, the committee focus is on floors. We are working to replace the hallway floor in front of the fireside room and the floor on the bridge between the two wings. We are also planning to repair and refinish the floor in the sanctuary and lounge.

## Contemporary Issues Forum

The Contemporary Issues Forum (CIF) – formerly called Coffee, Controversy & Conversation (CC&C) – has a four-decade history at RRUUC. During the pandemic CIF/CCC went virtual, via Zoom, and began recording and posting our speakers on YouTube. Our season ran from September 2022 through May 2023. CIF Committee Members invited notable guests who focused on timely topics, such as an update on war in Ukraine, preparing for emergencies & disasters, opportunities brought by migration, reparations for slavery & oppression, planet-friendly eating, strategies to get out the vote, good news in global agriculture, and donations of medicines and medical equipment to developing countries.

## Educating 4 Change Pathway

Educating 4 Change Pathway: Develops educational events that denounce systemic racism and promotes antiracist learning and action. Seeks to “transform from the inside out.”

Major activities this year include: two 4-session UUA Common Read groups discussing *Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism* by Karin Lin and Nancy Palmer Jones; congregation community brunch with Scotland AME and RRUUC lay leaders; biweekly book club for E4C members on antiracism and multiculturalism; monthly meetings to build community and enable planning for events.

If you are interested in learning more, reach out to [E4Cinfo@rruuc.org](mailto:E4Cinfo@rruuc.org).

Pathway co-chairs: Joan Zenzen and Rose Sokol

## Endowment Committee

The River Road Endowment Fund is invested in a diversified mix of securities, including both fixed income and socially responsible equity funds, to provide a long-term source of capital that the congregation may draw on to fund projects that promote liberal religion and to meet extraordinary financial expenses. Gifts to the Endowment Fund, including those from bequests by RRUUC members who have included RRUUC in their estate planning, have totaled approximately \$568,000 over the years. Despite regular withdrawals to fund Board-approved initiatives, the Endowment Fund has grown to approximately \$1.2 million as of May 2023.



## Earth Ministry

### Activities June 2022 to June 2023

#### Buildings and Grounds

- New roof with added insulation over the Sanctuary, worked with Building Committee
- Solar panels installed
- Building energy assessment completed through Pepco and Empower Maryland

#### Climate Education

- Talks on solar panels, driving efficiency, green investing, food and climate, UULM-Climate action
- RE program with vegetable garden, tree removal for more sunlight completed
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Green Sanctuary Recertification completed Jan 2023
- 3 Easy Climate Actions Initiative Sept. 2023: 60 people
- Climate Reset Workshops Oct.-Nov. 2023: 24 people

#### Legislative

- Supported the UULM-MD Climate Change Task Force's Maryland legislative lobbying
- Supported MoCo Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions lobbying in Montgomery County

#### Spirituality

- 2023 Year of Climate Reset declared by Rev. Nancy Ladd
- 6 sermons on climate and spirituality during the year

## Events

- May 6 UU DMV Climate Convocation hosted at RRUUC
- Monthly EM meetings via Zoom and hybrid live at 11:30am on the third Sunday of each month

## Finance Committee

RRUUC's Finance Committee (FC) had an engaging and constructive year. First and foremost, the FC collaborated closely with the Treasurer and staff (Senior Minister, Administrator, and Bookkeeper) to monitor and examine the ongoing financial health of RRUUC and to keep the Board of Trustees regularly updated. As noted in the Treasurer's report, thanks to the generosity of RRUUC members and friends, as well as the careful management of costs by staff, RRUUC remains on solid financial ground.

A key responsibility of the FC is to advise the Senior Minister and the Board as they develop the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year. In this context, the FC worked closely with both staff and the Financial Stewardship Committee to determine appropriate revenue assumptions for the budget in order to support RRUUC's desired mission and programs. The FC also collaborated closely with the Building Committee to inform the Board of likely capital investment needs in the coming year.

The FC supported two Town Hall discussions with members and friends about the emerging RRUUC budget for FY2023-24 so that the Board can consider congregational input before approving the final budget in June 2023.

Over the past year, the FC took stock of several aspects of RRUUC's finances. Current levels of insurance were examined and deemed appropriate. Moreover, upon benchmarking with other UU congregations, the FC discovered no cause to adjust current levels of the Operating Reserve (minimum \$225,000) and Capital Reserve (minimum \$100,000). The FC also explored the value of a Contingent Line of Credit in the event of a large capital need but concluded that potential costs greatly exceeded any likely need, particularly given the recent completion of the new roof and gutter system. And in the context of the recent banking sector turmoil, the FC has been examining ways to reduce risks to RRUUC financial accounts while optimizing returns and minimizing complexity.

Finally, the FC contributed to and led several important achievements: (a) after a nearly 3 year delay, RRUUC received a positive financial review from the independent accounting firm UHY (RRUUC bylaws require a financial review every five years and the next review will be a full financial audit after the completion of FY2024-25); (b) the FC played an important role working with the Earth Ministry to ensure a financially viable arrangement for the solar panels installed on RRUUC's roof last fall; (c) the amounts

raised for each month's Extend the Offerings are now reported more regularly in the eWeekly and on RRUUC's website; and (d) the FC worked with the Endowment Committee and Financial Stewardship Committee to review and propose finance-related updates to the RRUUC bylaws, policies, procedures, and our respective committee charters.

The FC would like to acknowledge the significant achievements of Tim Daniel, RRUUC's outgoing Treasurer. His steadfast stewardship of RRUUC finances and collaborative spirit over the past three highly uncertain years has served the Congregation extremely well. The FC also welcomes incoming Treasurer Jai Chopra and looks forward to working closely with him in the coming year.

2022-2023 Finance Committee Members: Aidan Jones, Barb Geiser (Chair), Doran Flowers, James Dodwell, Jenny Sour (Vice-Chair), John Hansman, and Page Lansdale.

## Financial Stewardship Campaign

For the 2023-2024 campaign, the Financial Stewardship Committee paused and took stock of the last three years of pandemic-related challenges. While the congregation had been quite generous, especially during the first difficult year of 2020-2021 when a special “pandemic extra pledge” was sought, we knew that this coming year was going to require even more generosity. This is mostly due to the ending of significant government assistance programs that have gotten us through the past few lean years. After much thought, we set the campaign goal at an ambitious \$1.1 million, with 325 individuals/households pledging. We knew this would be a stretch. It is significantly more than we raised last year. It would, however, be in line with the trend of pre-pandemic pledge campaigns, in terms of the number of pledges and campaign totals, adjusted for inflation.

This year’s goal was based on what it truly will take to sustain RRUUC resources including the staff, building, programs, and services. As we explained in our materials and presentations, “Now it is time to grow our congregation, fund our capital needs adequately, and return to sustainable annual finances. Meeting our campaign goal will allow Rev. Nancy and the board to move forward confidently with all the staffing and programming we have come to rely upon.”

As of May 19, 2023 we have raised \$885,353 from 276 individuals/households. Some things to note:

- We asked everyone to consider a 10% increase to their pledge if they could (this is double the 5% we requested last year). Of the nearly 100 pledgers who did increase their pledge this year, the average increase was 13.5%, which is really generous!
- At this time last year, the number of pledgers was down 5% from the previous year (2021-2022). We knew going into this campaign that growing our donor base would be equally as important as the dollar amount raised. In mid-April, a few generous donors stepped forward and offered a combined \$12,000 challenge with the stipulation that in order to unlock those funds, we needed to beat last year’s number of increased pledges, plus new or returning pledgers<sup>4</sup>, by having 140 of these. We have surpassed that number of new (27), returning (27), and increased (95) pledges, for a current total of 149, thus unlocking the additional

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<sup>4</sup> “Returning” pledgers are those who did not pledge last year, but did pledge in some previous year. “New” pledgers are individuals/households who have never previously pledged to RRUUC.

\$12,000 for the campaign. This bodes very well for the future of our congregation.

- Although we did not reach our goal, we are grateful for everyone who pledged. We are keenly aware of the economic challenges facing many, the life circumstances that change, and we are glad that so many people stepped up and made pledges. We are especially encouraged that the number of people pledging for the first time, including a significant number of non-members, has increased dramatically from last year and the prior two years.
- While the long-term financial health of the congregation depends most on bringing in new members and new contributors, on a year-to-year basis it is returning pledgers (i.e. those who pledged last year) who make up the vast bulk of the pledge campaign total. It is among these returning pledgers that we have seen significant, and increasing, attrition since the beginning of the pandemic. This year, we have “lost” two-thirds more previous pledgers than we did last year; presently there are more than 70 of these missing pledges, versus a total of 45 last year. Death took a toll on some of our households over the past year, some have moved to other congregations, and many have simply left the area. We were not anticipating such a large decrease in the number of returning pledgers, which resulted in the pledge total coming in below any pledge campaign in recent memory, as well as the drop in overall number of pledges.

We followed the model of the past few years of activities, including launching our campaign with a robust “All-in Sunday” kicking off timely pledging, and having Lead Stewards (including some committee members) share their own reasons for pledging to RRUUC during Sunday services. We are grateful to Pastor Evalina Huggins of Scotland AME Zion Church and Marcia Leonard for their inspiring messages to the congregation.

We communicated with the congregation via mail, e-mail, eWeekly announcements, Facebook, and telephone. We hosted two leadership events for those who give \$2,000 and above (one online and one in person in the Fellowship Hall). We made ourselves available after services to answer questions and responded promptly to the many questions sent to [stewardship@rruuc.org](mailto:stewardship@rruuc.org). We had planned to share celebratory cake after the Porch Chat at the retreat on April 22, but due to the rain, we instead served it at Coffee Hour at the retreat (which was better timing).

The members of the Financial Stewardship Committee (Lara Akinbami, Sara Ducey, Neele Johnson, Susan Messina, Josh Mohr, Susan Padgett, and Joy Rogers) offer thanks for the critical office support provided by Ana Lim, Susan Eckert, and Natalie Schall.





FSC Co-Chairs Neele Johnson and Susan Messina with the cake on April 22, 2023



Joy Rogers, Sara Ducey, Susan Messina, and Josh Mohr on "All-In Sunday", February 26, 2023

## Fine Arts Committee

The RRUUC Fine Arts Committee has started to support art shows as the Fellowship Hall has reopened.

We have had 2 live shows:

- 3/24/22 - 5/24/22: Mark Leatherman
- 2/26/23 - end of May: Mark and Vivian Brodsky

Neither show has generated sales.

We are working on filling the calendar for the future. We will have a short gap following the Brodsky show, then:

- 6/18/23 - 9/10/23: the RRUUC Members and Friends Show
- 9/17/23 - 10/29/23: 3 person Fused Glass and Jewelry Show
- Bazaar: November 4
- 11/5/23 - 1/7/24: Linda Button - painting - to be confirmed
- 2024 - dates TBD: Richard Levine

We hope that we can generate more sales for our shows - both for the artists and for RRUUC. We lost one committee member but have a new person who will be shadowing this year so that he can be a curator for next year.

All submission, contract, and sales documents have been recently updated (no substantial changes) and the changes were approved by the committee.

Respectfully submitted,  
Katherine Hubley  
Chair of the RRUUC Fine Arts Committee

## Green Sanctuary

In December 2022, RRUUC was officially recertified as a UUA Green Sanctuary. This achievement was the culmination of an intensive 2+ year-long process to meet new UUA guidelines updated since RRUUC 's original Green Sanctuary certification in 2006. A service was held on Sunday, January 22, 2023 to recognize the many RRUUC members who worked for Green Sanctuary recertification.

The process began in February 2020 when RRUUC hosted a Green Sanctuary Forum with five panelists from area UU congregations engaged in Green Sanctuary recertification. The RRUUC board then authorized the creation of an interdisciplinary task force to develop action items representing all aspects of congregational life. The Task Force:

1. Developed an online survey to determine congregational awareness about environmental issues and congregational priorities;
2. Matched congregational priorities with new UUA Green Sanctuary guidelines. These included Building Sustainability; Worship & Celebration; Environmental Justice; and Religious Education. The Task Force developed a Green Sanctuary Covenant for RRUUC and an Action Plan to meet UUA requirements;
3. Presented the Action Plan at RRUUC's Congregational Meeting in June 2020. In an all-congregational vote, RRUUC adopted Green Sanctuary recertification as a mandate.

Recommendations to RRUUC's Draft Action Plan were made by UUA in September 2020. Work began on implementing some of the Action Plan items during 2021 when the RRUUC building was closed by the pandemic. In early 2022, work resumed on completing UUA 2020 Green Sanctuary guidelines. Revised Action Items were submitted in August 2022. In collaboration with UUA, RRUUC received Green Sanctuary recertification in December 2022.

Among the outcomes of the RRUUC recertification process have been:

- Funding and installation of a water bottle refilling station near the Sanctuary in partnership with the Animal Ministry;
- Assessing and updating building sustainability measures managed by Earth Ministry;
- Promoting installation of solar panels in Fall 2022, in partnership with RRUUC Board of Trustees and Earth Ministry;

- Prioritizing native plants by the Grounds Committee;
- Adopting plant-based foods as the default menu served at RRUUC by staff management;
- Designating 2022-2023 as a year of climate reset by ministerial staff.

With recertification in 2022, the Green Sanctuary Task Force officially dissolved and upholding RRUUC Green Sanctuary commitments were transferred to Earth Ministry.

Green Sanctuary Task Force: Charlotte Moser (chair), Bruce Davis, Marcie Meditch, Heidi Mordhorst, Glen Peppel, Joe Saliunas, Leigh Scott, David Ward, Walter Weiss

## Grounds Committee

The Grounds Committee manages our grounds to support the RRUUC mission and reflect our values, including appreciation of beauty, protection of the interdependent web of all creation, and stewardship of our land and watershed. The Committee had regular workdays over the past year resulting in the following accomplishments.

- We continue to remove non-native invasive plants site-wide and to expand the number and diversity of native plants on site. We made significant improvements to the Peace Pole garden, and the gardens adjacent to the lawn area by the Sanctuary.
- We started using Mosquito Dunks site-wide to control mosquitoes without harmful spraying.
- We removed several trees along River Road to allow more sun to reach the vegetable garden.
- We installed solar lights on the signage facing Whittier Blvd.
- Started reconfiguration of the water feature in the Memorial Garden to significantly increase the water surface and use the waterfall to help mask noise from River Road.

Over the next year we will be developing options on how to best use/plant the area where two trees were removed by the front plaza, and we will solicit feedback on how we can best use this area to support RRUUC's mission while maintaining high aesthetic values.

The Grounds Committee is actively looking for new members. Members will be provided with mentoring on gardening techniques and will build knowledge in gardening with native plants.

## Land and Labor Acknowledgment Task Force (LLATF)

The LLATF spent the congregational year exploring ideas for memorializing the Indigenous people and the enslaved African people who formerly lived on and worked the land that now includes River Road UU Congregation (RRUUC). This effort led to our submittal of a proposal to the River Road Board, and the Board's acceptance of this proposal. The Board approved:

1. A bronze plaque with a land and labor acknowledgment to be placed in the lobby of the congregation's building. The proposed wording is:

River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
Land and Labor Acknowledgment and Pledge  
June 2023  
<<River Road logo>>

We acknowledge that the land on which we worship is the traditional land of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway people and the land through which other Indigenous Peoples traveled. We acknowledge that enslaved African people and their descendants likely labored and lived on this land. We recognize these and other people displaced, enslaved, or harmed by past injustices.

We pledge that we will follow our faith in love and work to make our congregation and our larger community more accessible, inclusive, and equitable. We pledge that we will be good stewards of the land by encouraging healthy ecosystems. We pledge to remember the past while building a more just and welcoming future for all.

2. A wayside to be placed on RRUUC's grounds, near the sidewalk so that passersby can read about the history of our land with respect to the Indigenous people and the enslaved African people.
3. An annual donation of \$2,500 for the next five years to the nonprofit Through Piscataway Eyes and \$2,500 to a Montgomery County nonprofit that supports African Americans.

The plaque and wayside are in development as of May 2023, with a hoped-for installation in time for the new congregational year in Fall 2023.



Submitted by Joan M. Zenzen

LLATF members have included: Joan Zenzen, Joe Saliunas, Charlotte Moser, Barb Nooter, Karla Brandt, Josh Mohr, Lisa Rubenstein (Board liaison), and Rev. Amanda Weatherspoon.

## Latin American Team Network (LATN)

LATN continued its solidarity with Salvadorans living in the DC area with supporting two COTSA (the association of seventeen Salvadorian hometown groups) events.

Finally with the return to in person attendance at RRUUC, the sales of fair-trade products resumed. Funds from the sale of these products provide a little support to UUSC and past scholarships for immigrants at DC's Carlos Rosario school and solar water projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua through the work of Companion Community for Development Alternatives (CoCoDA).

LATN sponsored an event that raised \$5,000 for the Abriendo Brecha elementary school in Chiapas Mexico.

LATN members of RRUUC have advocated for national legislative and policy solutions to U.S. immigration issues in their work with UUs for Social Justice (UUSJ).

## Leadership and Nominations (L&N) Committee

The L&N Committee convened in September 2022, welcoming new members Ursula Scott, Gregg Grisa, Joel Schrag, and Ailea Sneller, who all began two-year terms. They joined Talley Lach, Dave Whitman, Stuart Silverman, and Barbara Saliunas in carrying out the work of the Committee for the congregational year. The co-chairs of the L&N Committee were designated as: Joel Schrag, Ailea Sneller, and Stuart Silverman.

Building on new outreach initiatives from last year, in January 2023 the L&N Committee broadcasted a congregation-wide email message entitled "The Meaning of Leadership," which encouraged congregants to volunteer to serve either on the RRUUC Board of Trustees or the Leadership and Nominations Committee. The Committee also facilitated the development of video testimonials from former members of the Board of Trustees or L&N Committee, sharing their experiences in leadership roles as a way to inspire and motivate congregants to consider service on the Board of Trustees or the L&N Committee. In all, four testimonials were recorded and distributed to the congregation between January and March. These testimonials helped to inspire congregants to serve in leadership positions at RRUUC. In all our candidate recruitment efforts, the Committee sought increased representation along many dimensions of diversity.

Despite the challenges common to many faith communities in identifying congregants willing and available to serve in key governance positions, the Committee successfully completed its charge to identify candidates for open Board of Trustees and Leadership & Nomination Committee members. The Committee nominated Rich Bergemann, Dan Glor, and Mandy Wimmer-O'Brien to serve as the three new members to the Board of Trustees, and it nominated Rob Nooter, Peg Terry, Teresa Souza, and Lisa Moore to serve as the four new members of the L&N Committee.

In addition to recruiting candidates for the Board and the L&N Committee, we coordinated the nomination of delegates to represent RRUUC at the UUA General Assembly. These candidates were proposed to the Board for its final selection. The Committee also identified candidates for recognition for Leadership Fellow Awards, celebrating extraordinary leadership contributions to the congregation. For the Leadership Fellow Awards, there were two projects that were identified, along with specified members of the congregation whose efforts were exemplary in bringing about successful results. Specifically, the projects and individuals chosen were: the Solar Panel

Project, led by Bruce Davis and Nick Kamphaus; and the Green Sanctuary Project, led by Charlotte Moser. Generally, the L&N Committee recognizes that many other members served on these projects, and their efforts are also greatly appreciated.

The Committee also introduced new administrative tools to better facilitate Committee business and communication, including the use of a Google Group, reorganized Google Drive, a revamped candidate tracker, and dedicated Committee admin email address to consolidate account management.

## Partner Church Committee

The Partner Church Committee's main responsibility is to serve as the steward for River Road's two partner church relationships, one with Unitarian church in Fiatfalva, Transylvania (located in present-day Romania) and the other in Mawblang, in the Khasi Hills in Northeast India. We are making stronger efforts to be in more frequent communications with our partners via Zoom, email, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Zoom, in particular, really allowed for more frequent face-to-face communication, which was formerly only possible with in-person travel. We cherish being able to learn about life in our partners' communities and just having fun talking.

The Committee supports our partners by raising money to fund projects in each place. These include support for the Fiatfalva church's budget, an afterschool program in Fiatfalva that benefits disadvantaged children, mainly from the Roma community, and salary supplements for three teachers at the Mawblang Unitarian school, which is open to the entire village.

In order to raise funds, the Committee holds an annual PartnerFest fundraiser and participates in Extend the Offering (ETO). The 30th Annual PartnerFest on October 15, 2022, has a video at [youtu.be/dFH3gBOJl6k](https://youtu.be/dFH3gBOJl6k). (The entertainment program starts at the 16 minute mark). The musical program featured a concert by violinist Anto Malkastian and River Road's own Shuai Wang on the piano. The event was a great success, particularly because it offered the chance to see friends in person at the first open congregational event since the onset of the COVID pandemic. Likewise, people seem to really like the chance to eat a large variety of appetizers.

We used PartnerFest and the ETO as a chance to educate our congregation about the program and what we do. We had periodic articles in the eWeekly about our contacts with our partners and our program. We participated in the Social Justice Fair to explain our projects. While travel opportunities are more limited than before the pandemic, Janice Hazlehurst and Rita Parks were able to join a trip to India planned by Cedar Lane UU Church. This gave Janice the opportunity to visit our friends in Mawblang. We will be visited in July by Rev. Nangroi Suting, who lives in the Khasi Hills and is involved in the Unitarian community there. He is attending General Assembly and visiting several American churches while here.

The Potomac Partnership facilitated quarterly meetings of the Partner Church Committees of River Road, Cedar Lane, and Fairfax churches. The PCC group expanded to include DMV Unitarian partner church committees. We are meeting in-person at each of our various churches, with River Road hosting in fall.

Finally, we note with sadness the sudden passing Pat (Patricia) Wand, who was a founding member of the committee. Pat will be deeply missed by the entire River Road community and especially by the Partner Church committee members. She had visited both partners and encouraged international friendships. Pat was an inspiration to us all.

Ursula Scott, Chair

Joel Schrag, Vice Chair & Fiatfalva contact

Sara Adams, Secretary

Janice Hazlehurst, Mawblang contact



## Retreat Committee

The April 2023 All-Congregation Retreat was well-received and well-attended. The programming was varied and planned for adults and children. Programs included arts & crafts, drumming, singing, environmental programs, a visit from live animals native to our area, nature hikes, games and sports (including badminton, corn hole, and frisbee golf) and opportunities to relax and hang out. The Sunday worship service was held under the pavilion at the park, with all members welcome to attend, whether or not they were registered for the day. See this link for the full [schedule and description of programs](#).

We provided lunch both days. Saturday lunch, provided by the Animal Ministry, consisted of a vegan cookout and delicious cookies. Sunday's lunch, planned and prepared by Marcia Leonard, consisted of wraps, vegetable plates, and much more. Nearly 100 people attended on Saturday and somewhat fewer people attended on Sunday. At least 17 children participated in the Retreat.

We held the Retreat at Seneca Creek State Park at Blue Jay and Nuthatch Pavilions—the same two large pavilions that we rented for the April 2022 Retreat. Saturday, April 22 turned cold and rainy in the early afternoon, forcing us to cancel or modify some activities and close the Retreat early. Sunday, April 23 was clear and crisp, but the weather was unexpectedly cool.

For the first time since March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began in Maryland, the activities—all outdoors—had a “normal” feel. However, to address any lingering safety concerns, the committee has decided that the current format, a two-day local event rather than the traditional sleep-away weekend, is more comfortable for most congregants, so we will continue to plan for this format and gauge the congregation's interest in a go-away retreat in the future.

Our 2024 All-Congregation Retreat will be one week later than last year's: Saturday April 27 and Sunday April 28, location to be determined. See the Addendum for a few pictures from Retreat 2023.

Respectfully submitted,  
Diana Gilpatrick and Jan Elicker  
for the Retreat Committee

# Addendum









## Supporting Educational Access Pathway (SEAP)

This pathway raises funds for River Road's College Access Scholarship Fund and awards merit scholarships to applicants from Mentors, Inc. @ Kid Power and College Bound mentoring programs. It also supports Beacon House.

### Recent Activities:

- Our College Access Fundraiser was held virtually on September 26, 2022, with a performance by the vocalist Lea Morris, a Baltimore native.
- The musical fundraiser, the Extend the Offering collection, other donations, and interest from our endowment raised funds to provide scholarships to additional students in 2023.
- In 2023, we selected four students to receive 4-year scholarships. Three students from the College Bound program and one student from Mentors, Inc. @ Kid Power.
- Currently a River Roder, Christine Ladd, volunteers weekly throughout the school year at College Bound, assisting the students in their scholarship and college application processes.
- Provided annual holiday gifts and donations to Beacon House.
- On May 17, 2023, Rita Parks and Kathryn Gargurevich attended College Bound's 32nd Annual End of Year Celebration and awarded our three scholarships to their graduating seniors. This was the first live EOY celebration since 2019.
- On June 7, 2023, Rita Parks attended the 2023 Kid Power Graduation Celebration and awarded our scholarship to their graduating senior.



## Shelter Week

For the 35th year in a row, RRUUC congregants made Shelter Week (March 19-24) a big success. Sixty-five volunteers provided a week's worth of meals and supplies for homeless women at the Interfaith Works Women's Center in Rockville. The delicious food won rave reviews from the residents. Next year, there will be an opportunity for more volunteer participation. The Shelter has loosened COVID restrictions and will once again allow RRUUC congregants to come to the Shelter to serve dinner.





## The Shepherd's Table

For the last 34 years, volunteers from RRUUC have been feeding hungry and needy people at The Shepherd's Table, a soup kitchen in Silver Spring operated cooperatively by congregations in Montgomery County. On the second Tuesday of each month a team of 10 people from the RRUUC community serves dinner to as many as 160 men, women and children. This can be a lifeline for many people in our community. Some of the clients are people we have seen and fed for the 34 years we have been there and have become friends with, some have come regularly for a shorter period of time, and some are people who are just having a bad time for a while and need a helping hand to tide them over for a month or two. During, and now after, the COVID pandemic we have been feeding more families, often with several children.

The total RRUUC team numbers about 40 congregation members and friends, with the participants each month changing, based on their availability. RRUUC also supports The Shepherd's Table with monetary donations from Extend the Offering as well as with food from the RRUUC garden. Peter Benjamin has been a coordinator for this RRUUC activity since its inception at our congregation, and can be contacted at [kp.benj@verizon.net](mailto:kp.benj@verizon.net) or at 301-933-8865.

Peter Benjamin

## RRUUC Report on Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

On February 5, 2023, Reverend Mary Katherine Morn, President and CEO of UUSC, and Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson, Minister of the UUC of the South Fork of Long Island, preached to RRUUC. Rev. Morn has been serving as the President of the UUSC since 2018. She has contributed to efforts for economic, racial, and social justice in Macon, Georgia at the Economic Opportunity Council/Headstart with the NAACP and worked in the reproductive justice movement. In Fairfax, Virginia, she worked with interfaith ministries addressing hunger and homelessness, collaborated with LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations and served on the county's homelessness task force. She also served on the volunteer leadership of the UU Ministers' Association and for four years as Director of Stewardship and Development for the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson serves as minister of the UU Congregation on Long Island in Bridgehampton, NY. Her ministry and her preaching encourage us to connect to our most deeply held values so that we can live our faith in the world. Before her ministry, Kimberly worked as a union organizer with the United Auto Workers (UAW). She continues to teach Women's and Gender Studies at New Jersey City University. The core of Kimberly's ministry services on the Organizing Collective Board for Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU). She also serves on the board of the UU Women's Federation (UUWF). She serves as vice president of the St. Lawrence Foundation for Theological Education, and as a member of the Steering Committee for UU Class Conversations, and the UUA Appointments Committee. She works at the nexus of faith formation, youth ministry, and racial justice as a Program Leader with the UU College of Social Justice.

## Widows or Widowers

Widows or Widowers (WoW) continue to meet, mainly via Zoom, once a week. Our meetings are largely social, but also, we discuss problems or concerns of members. Some of us occasionally ate lunch at a restaurant or at a member's home. We had a few of our 'waffle breakfasts.' We encouraged each other to participate in activities at RRUUC and attend church in person, when that resumed. But some still prefer to attend via Zoom. It is easy to attend Zoom services—you can attend in PJs, and no driving. But those who venture to church enjoy the social hour and lunch at a restaurant afterwards. All these activities allow members to continue to engage in life. We had a few small fun meetings that were not on Sunday, but it will take time to resume a more active program. The listserv is used to share public service information like voting information, current scams, COVID safety info, vaccinations, and announcements of RRUUC & WoW activities.

There is one sad note, with the loss of a long time member of RRUUC and WoW. Bob Heiderer died in September 2022 at 99. He is missed and we were blessed to share part of his life. Each time we continue our tradition of waffles, we will think of him, since we used to have them at Bob's house.

Submitted by Ursula Scott, convener

## Witnessing for Justice Pathway

Contact Jana Kirkman, 301-785-9270 or [improbableyarns@gmail.com](mailto:improbableyarns@gmail.com).

Witnessing for Justice develops witnessing engagements for the RRUUC community, including Black Lives Matter vigils.

From July 2022 to the present, Witnessing for Justice has held almost fifty hour-long roadside witnesses for Black Lives at the corner of River and Whittier Roads. Except for July and August, when we witnessed once each month, we were out on the corner holding vigil for an hour every Friday evening from 6:30pm to 7:30pm. All are welcome!

We engage respectfully with community members who approach us, and receive a lot of gestures of support from passing cars.

For some of us, this is a spiritual discipline. For most of us, this is a community-building activity. For all of us, this is social justice work.