
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

December 19, 2023

Attending:

A meeting of the UUCOD Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023.

Board Members attending in person: Bob Rancourt, President, Jerry L'Hommedieu, Treasurer, Claudia Simmons, Secretary, Rev. Ian W. Riddell, Minister, Fran Hoag, 2nd Vice President, Walter Gendell, Director at Large

Board Members Absent: Julia Alberg-Burbank, 1st Vice President

Board Members attending by Zoom online: Carol McDaniel, Director at Large

Others Present: Randy Steel, Linda Savard

Welcome and Call to Order

Bob called the regular Board Meeting to order at 5:00 PST.

Chalice Lighting

Rev. Riddell offered inspirational sentiments and lit the chalice.

Check-In

Bob welcomed everyone and he and the Board checked in. Everyone is feeling challenged both with medical conditions and with those who have passed and the partners they have left behind. On the bright side, Santa's Elves (Rev. Ian and Pam Bilbo) dropped off thank you boxes of cookies to the Board with much gratitude from the staff.

Process Moderation

Process monitor was assigned to Walter Gendell.

Consent Agenda

- The Board approved a motion to approve the November 14, 2023, Meeting Minutes [Moved by Jerry L'Hommedieu and seconded by Fran Hoag].

Voices of the Congregation

- Review of Charitable Bequests Soft Launch Update
 - The Soft Launch was well received. See attached report. The Full launch will happen in March.
 - Fran Hoag will be putting up information regarding charitable giving on the website.

- It was suggested that an article be written for the Newsletter prior to March launch. Bob Rancourt will circle back with Rob DuWors and Julia Bell to ask that this article be written and to thank them for their initiative in launching Charitable Bequests.

Old Business

- Nomination and Designation of Attitude of Gratitude Note Recipients:
 - Carol McDaniel recommended Bill Masco and Joni Paddock for their stellar efforts in December's Food Drive, as well as thanking them for hosting Thanksgiving Dinner.

Unfinished Business

- Review, Consideration, and Discussion of Current Leadership and Committees' Needs:
 - Linda Savard reported: Leadership Development Committee wants to share:
 - The need for a new Facilities Chair, Finance Chair, Co-Chair for Social Justice. Barb Ketay has agreed to be the Archivist. Also, in need of a new Member for AV and Facilities, and new Board Members for next year.
 - The need to finding people willing to volunteer for one-time activities. UUCOD membership is aging and with its share of part-time congregants, there are many needs and not enough people who are willing and wanting to volunteer.
 - Brainstormed a few ideas:
 - Consider making the Board smaller or having the At-Large Board Members be Chairs or Co-Chairs with groups that are hard to get people to work on.
 - Facilities is a small group and really needs more help.
 - Outreach group is working with Stewardship.
 - Time for the Board and the congregation to look at how we are organized and how we are doing things.
 - Rev. Ian says that 'visioning' is a go for the coming year.
 - Walter talked about the aging demographic and the need to focus on outreach regarding new members.
 - Board is asked to help take on leadership for potential changes. This topic will go into "Unfinished Business" for next month's Board meeting.
- Review, Consideration, and Discussion of the Status of Personnel Advisory Committee's Draft Recommendations for Ministerial Evaluation Process and Procedures.
 - Walter Gendell ... reported that he and Rev. Ian met to craft the Reverend's evaluation form. The process continues and will include how to give and get feedback to the Board and feedback to Rev. Ian.
 - Objectives to be covered: Essential functions (1), core competencies (2), short- and long-term goals (3). Please reference Walter Gendell's Monthly Report for a more in-depth review on this subject.
 - Rev. Ian's input is that his work now is incorporated in the Board's goals with which he has specific overview. One of his specific professional goals is figuring how to do this evaluation. Reverend Ian wanted to ensure that the Board understood that such a performance evaluation of a minister is very different than that of a large organization. A Reverend's performance evaluation is not an opportunity to for the congregation to take its minister to task.

- It should be kept in mind that this is a shared ministry. Communication needs to be made to the congregation, and the shared-ministry concept should be revisited with the congregation from time to time.
- Review, Consideration, and Discussion of Joining Calls to Establish Chuckwalla National Monument and Expand Joshua Tree National Park.
 - Fran Hoag is the point person on this. Katie Barrows came to Fran and asked for UUCOD's support for this new monument. Asked if someone would be interested in drafting letter from UUCOD.
 - Jerry L'Hommedieu didn't think the draft letter needed much wordsmithing.
 - Rev Ian needs to check By-Laws on UUCOD's writing this letter to make sure the church will be following its values. Rev. Ian will circle back on this subject.
- Review of Sacred Grounds Initiative's January 7, 2024, Dedication of Desert Canyon Habitat Demonstration Garden and Donation of John Ressler's Stamp.
 - Rod and Randy both present. Discussed how the Board can help with this event.
 - Randy reported that there will be 7 outside vendors to celebrate the kickoff. Also new merchandise has been ordered. T-shirts, tote bags coffee mugs and thank you cards.
 - There will be a welcome table down by the labyrinth with baked goods and beverages.
 - Couple of tables of artwork which will include labyrinth. \$-25 or \$30. Artwork will be priced accordingly. All hands-on deck. Anticipate 130-150 people in attendance that day. Ready at 9:00.
 - Asking Board for bodies to help set up community room on Saturday for overflow audience.
 - Vendors will be supplied tables. Presence of Board will be much appreciated. 9:00 a.m. Board should be present.
 - Walter asked for names of outside vendors for future thank you notes.
 - Rod expressed that everyone should be greeted and made to feel welcome. Board would be good at doing this as well as Membership.
 - Exhibitor fair will be set up the morning of. Claudia Simmons volunteers to stay at labyrinth during service as A/V equipment will be in the area.
 - Need a videographer.
 - Discussed where to put John Ressler's Stamp Pushed to Sacred Grounds to manage installation.
- Review and Discussion of Board Reading: "Transforming Conflict: The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil" (Ch. 3).
 - Rev Ian shared that one of the practices to engage in, is our personal work at resisting one's nature to completely blame another.
 - Chapters 4 and 5 of the book will be discussed at the January 2024 Board meeting.

New Business

- Review and Discussion of Monthly Reports
 - Bob Rancourt
 - Fran Hoag mentioned that Jerry was focusing on monthly articles on stewardship.
 - Carol McDaniel reported that a lot of extra money was given, both in toys and food.
 - Jerry L'Hommedieu reported that the auction has taken in \$29,300.

- Rev. Ian reported that he will be on study leave between Christmas and New Year's. Further, he will be on vacation from Jan 6th to 13th.
- Review and Consideration of Possible Participation in 2024 CV Giving Day
 - It was asked if the Board had an interest in being one of the recipients of this CV Giving Day, to be held on March 5, 2024.
 - Jerry L'Hommedieu will investigate this to see if it's a good fit for the Church.
- Review and Consideration of Approach to Next Year's Visioning Process
 - Rev. Ian will have more of a presentation for January Board meeting.
 - May look something like what the call team did regarding what the Church's mission and vision will be going forward. Example: It may be helpful to hire an outside facilitator to get us going to spark some creativity.
 - This would start right after pledge drive ends. This does not have to be done by the end of April.
 - Might it be helpful to have an evaluation to sit down and look at the work of the congregation. Consider what the Board's responsibility is? What the Committee's responsibilities are? Healthy to have this conversation occasionally.
- Review and Consideration of Employee Jury Duty Leave Policy
 - Tabled to next meeting.

Process Moderation

- Walter reported that the Board Meeting finished early at 7:13, and that everyone had been heard.

Chalice Extinguishment

- Rev. Riddell extinguished the chalice with words of gratitude.

Adjournment

- Bob adjourned the regular Board meeting at 7:15pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Claudia L. Simmons

Claudia L. Simmons, Secretary
Attachments

Date Approved: January 16, 2024

Monthly Reports
 Charitable Bequest Soft Launch Results
 Sacred Grounds December Report to the Board
 Draft Letter in Support For Chuckwalla National Monument
 The California Desert Region Economic Benefits

President's Report



MEETING DATE:	December 19, 2023
REPORTING PERIOD:	Nov. 13 to Dec. 19, 2023
TYPE:	Monthly Board
AUTHOR:	Bob Rancourt

My assigned Board liaison constituencies are the Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Ministry (DIBM), Leadership Development Committee, and Personnel Advisory Committee. Additionally, I prepare agenda for and preside over Board meetings, and, as time permits, I volunteer as a greeter and usher for the Membership Committee.

DIBM

DIBM met once during this time. Members continue to study neurodivergence. DIBM also continues to work on reviewing the assessment completed in the last Strategic Goals cycle toward making recommendations to enhance diversity and help our beloved community continue to work on being more welcoming.

Leadership Development Committee

No meeting convened during this time. President Ex Officio Savard is presenting an oral update at this meeting concerning the perceived current leadership and committees' needs.

Personnel Advisory Committee

No meeting convened during this time. Rev. Riddell and Walter are meeting and drafting the broad strokes of the ministerial evaluation form and process for the new Settled Minister.

Additional Information

During this time, I wrote a President's Column article for the December newsletter reflecting on the church's life this past year. After my monthly Board planning meeting with Rev. Riddell, I prepared the agenda for and presided over the November 14 Regular Meeting.

On November 16, I attended the Pacific Western Region's Presidents' Meeting, an ongoing regular gathering of sitting Presidents from the region who try to brainstorm and collaborate on administrative issues.

On November 19, I introduced SafeHouse of the Desert representatives during worship as the Social Justice Committee's assigned liaison for the monthly Share-the-Plate collection that in November doubles as a holiday fundraiser for this community partner. As liaison, I also coordinated the process and distribution ahead of and after the collection itself.

The Board's Ad Hoc Communications Team Creation Committee had a meeting during this reporting period that I couldn't attend. The draft charter and general ideas remain pending and additional work and meetings will continue to finalize an outline for approval of the new Communications Team.

On December 3, I attended the Sacred Grounds Initiative's opening and dedication of the Celebration Garden after service.

On December 19, Rev. Riddell, Jerry, and me are meeting to discuss and plan the annual Pledge Drive and next year's budget.

To: UUCOD Board
From: Julia Alberg-Burbank, 1st VP
RE:December 2023 Board Report

Participation:

- I attended a welcome mixer for newer members at the home of Jerry L'Hommedieu and Rob DuWors
- I attended the monthly Worship Associates meeting.
- I supported the boxing of food from the food drive on 12/9/23. It was a great deal of fun and quick work.

Denominational Affairs: Jane has a copy of the completed revised version of Article II (in the UUA By-laws) that Pam will put in the January 2024 Newsletter. Everyone is encouraged to read it.

Jane is also putting a short introduction including a link to the FAQ's and an explanation/statement "Where did our Principles Go".

Rev. Ian and Jane are discussing how to bring more conversations with congregants about the pending vote in June at the GA.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Alberg-Burbank

Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert
2nd VP report to the Board
December 19, 2023

Stewardship

- We discussed details for the Pledge Drive Kick-off. We will sponsor a Chili Cook-off on January 28.
- Chili will be judged in three categories: Vegan, Vegetarian and Meat.
- Contestants will have voting cups on their tables. UUCOD Members will vote by placing bingo chips in the contestant's cups.
- The winner of each category will receive a certificate and the overall winner will receive the trophy which passes from the prior winner to the new winner.
- Instructions and sign-up information will be included in the January newsletter.
- We are working with Jack Fitzsimmons for imaging for the Chili-cook-off and the pledge drive.

Chuckwalla National Monument

- I gathered the information that Katie Barrows sent onto the Board's share drive.
- I started a draft of a letter of support from UUCOD. I intend on refining that after the Board discussion at the December 19 meeting.

Website

- I highlighted volunteer opportunities on the front page. They are listed, with images and details, in a column under the events for the week. This is a tool that, with communication, can be used to increase awareness of volunteer needs.
- I posted the latest message from the Minister and the Sacred Grounds update.

Submitted by Fran Hoag

UUCOD Treasurer's Report

November 2023

As of November 30, UUCOD held cash deposits of \$274,315.81 which includes \$198,810.23 invested with UUA and a CD with Pacific Premier Bank. Of the total amount, \$225,317.71 is held in either dedicated or restricted funds. This leaves \$48,998.10 in available unrestricted funds; up from \$26,451.93 in October. In addition, UUCOD has \$133,930.26 invested with UUA in the MacLean Endowment Circle Fund.

The increase in unrestricted funds is almost exclusively the result of UUCOD having its most successful service auction ever. With only a few auction payments outstanding, we received \$28,654 in proceeds and less than \$300 in expenses. This is nearly a \$5,000 increase over our previous most-successful auction. There are several auction items remaining which will be offered for sale, and we anticipate another \$2,000 in proceeds will be received.

UUCOD also had its most successful holiday fundraising campaign to support the CVUSD's Migrant Family Program and SafeHouse of the Desert. While donations continue to be received, at last count we raised over \$4,200 for food and \$2,650 for toys to be distributed to migrant worker families, and \$1,300 to be distributed as gift cards to residents of SafeHouse of the Desert. The total amount exceeds last year's holiday campaign by nearly \$1,000.

Plate collections at Rev. Ian's installation ceremony totaled \$1,181 which were equally shared with UUA's Living Tradition Fund and the Transgender Health and Wellness Center in Palm Springs.

There were no exceptional expenses incurred in November although our investments with UUA through the MacLean Endowment Circle Fund and the UUCOD Investment Fund lost approximately \$8,500 in value. The overall market has improved over the past several weeks and we anticipate recovering those funds in December.

The Finance Committee has started planning for this year's pledge drive. Chris Eager will serve as the pledge drive leader with various Finance Committee members serving as stewards. The pledge drive will run from January 28 through February 29. We will kick off the pledge drive on January 28 with a chili cookoff on the patio and celebrate the completion of the pledge drive on March 3 with a dessert potluck. The Stewardship Committee is helping coordinate these two activities.

The Finance Committee has begun preparing for the FY 24-25 budget cycle and anticipates a first draft of the budget by the 2nd week of February. The board authorized further fundraising in December by the Sacred Grounds team to fund additional habitats on UUCOD's grounds. Finally, board members and members of the Membership and Stewardship Committees welcomed new members and friends on November 17 at an appetizer potluck held at the home of Rob DuWors and Jerry L'Hommedieu.

Jerry L'Hommedieu
December 6, 2023

Minister's Report to the UUCOD Board

December 19, 2023

The Rev. Ian W. Riddell

This has been a painful and challenging month for our congregation as two of our beloved members—Rusty Kaplan and Gloria Kapp—died suddenly and unexpectedly. I was grateful and honored to spend a little time with the choir and the Social Justice Committee as they processed these losses that took beloved members from them. We head into the holiday season with much grief in our hearts. We have also been grappling with several frightening and threatening health diagnoses this season and are holding those people in love as well.

And we also carry hope and possibility with us. Our congregation knows so well how to take care of each other, to surround those who are mourning and anxious in love and tenderness and kindness. It is beautiful to see and experience.

I am also grateful for the love and care and tenderness I've received from the congregation after my car accident on December 1.

The holiday season is meant to be a time of love and celebration and we have much to celebrate in our beloved community.

Summary Outline of the work I've been involved with for the past month. This is not an exhaustive list, but is meant to give you a general idea of what I've been up to as your minister.

A. Counseling and Pastoral Care

- The Care Team continues to check in and share our contacts with congregants and offer each other guidance and support in our support of congregants' needs.
- The Care Team and I will present a workshop after the service on January 21 sharing our new guiding document and engaging the congregation in conversation and exploration around the questions of "How are we a caring community?" and "What does it mean to care for each other?"
- I continue to meet with congregants in need of connection and conversation by phone and Zoom and in person.
- I am heartened, as always, by the ways I see you all take care of each other when people are in need.

- On December 13, I hosted two sessions, one in person and one on zoom, for congregants to gather in quiet together to share their feelings and be in community and solidarity together. A total of 12 people attended.

B. Administration, Governance, and Staff

- I meet weekly with Pam Bibo to check in on work expectations and how things are going.
- The Committee on Ministry met this month and laid out some plans for several projects we'll be exploring in the new year
- I continue to meet monthly with President Bob Rancourt and First Vice President July Alberg-Burbank to plan the agenda for the monthly Board meeting and coordinate on other issues.
- I work every three months with Sue Caspari to update our reporting of copyrighted music use through our Christian Copyright Solutions account.
- Walter and I continue to meet to discuss ministerial evaluation. He will present where we are at this month's meeting.
- Jerry L'Hommedieu and I met to plan the safety information and training sessions we'll be presenting in late January and early February.
- I attended a webinar in upcoming issues in HR sponsored by ChurchWest insurance.
- I met with President, Bob Rancourt, and Treasurer, Jerry L'Hommedieu to begin planning our next pledge drive.
- I met with Jerry L'Hommedieu to make plans for safety trainings to be held in late January and early February.

C. Membership and Committees

- We welcomed 8 new members at our service on November 19!!
- I attended the new member social hosted by Jerry and Rob. What a wonderful evening!
- I meet monthly with the DIB Ministry team. We are educating ourselves about issues of neurodivergence as we explore a broad view of inclusion and welcome. We are also working with the assessment last year's team did of our congregation around ARAOMC issues in the ways we live out our goals in community.
- I participated in the Stewardship and Social Justice meetings this month.

D. Lifespan Faith-Development

- I meet monthly with the Chalice Circle Facilitators. The Chalice Circles continue to follow our monthly themes based on the newly articulated Article II values.
- I attended the showing of Rabbi Mark and Harriet's film hosted by DOS at our congregation on December 3. Despite technical difficulties it was a wonderful evening as Mark and Harriet shared the story of their ministries in depth.

E. Worship

- We have service leaders planned through the beginning of April
- I continue to lead the weekly Production meetings, though others take the lead when I am out of town or away. In our production meetings, we continue the practice of reflecting on the service the day before and noting any issues we need to address.
- What a joy it was to have our choir back in worship under the direction of our new Choir Director, Jim Tong. Already, new people are joining the choir and the months and years ahead look to be wonderful!
- I led or participated in worship several times:
 - November 19 — Setting a Welcoming Table with Denise Janssen Eager as Worship Associate.
 - November 26 — Rest as Resistance with Joni Paddock as Worship Associate.
 - December 3 — The Epic of Love with Steven Toporoff as Worship Associate.
 - December 10 — The Light of Love with Denise Janssen Eager as Worship Associate
- We welcomed Nikko Beltran from Compassion and Choices to our pulpit this month.
- I worked with Choir Director Jim Tong to contract a regular choir rehearsal pianist: Denis Moreen
- On December 14 I hosted our second “Blue Holiday” service for people having difficulty with the celebration of the season. 7 people participated.
- Because of the deaths in the congregation, I participated in leading worship on December 17, which would normally have been my Sunday off.

F. Denominational Activities

- I participated in a UUA-sponsored training on disability justice.
- I regularly consult with local and regional colleagues on issues affecting our congregations.
- On December 2, I attended the celebration of life for my colleague The Rev. Carolyn Owen Towle at First UU in San Diego. It was my first time back at FUUSD since my departure in 2019. It was good to reconnect with colleagues and former congregants and the service was beautiful.
- I continue meeting monthly as a mentor to a person in the ministerial formation process for feedback, support, and context setting as they move through the credentialing process. I have taken on the role of mentor to another new minister as he enters Preliminary Fellowship. Both of these mentoring roles together will take about 2.5 hours a month of my time.

G. Prophetic Outreach, Interfaith Activities, and Local Collaboration

- I participated with several members in the Trans Day of Remembrance Vigil in Palm Springs on November 20.
- The Desert Interfaith Council is on hiatus this fall as the group determines the future path of the organization. I attended the final regular meeting this month.

- I preached with Rabbi King at the DOS service on November 10.

H. Personal and Professional Growth

- I continue meeting monthly with a coach for ongoing support, learning, and accountability as I minister to the congregation in our diversity transition work. My coach is Rev. Julica Hermann de la Fuente
- I meet monthly with a small group of colleagues in our region in reflection, sharing, and collegial support and learning.
- I also meet weekly with my therapist. I have put my weekly Spanish meetings on hold for the time being.

in peace and deep love



My weekly schedule is as follows:

Currently, my day off is Friday. Thursday continues to be my writing/reading day, which I try to keep free of meetings.

Upcoming Travel Schedule:

- I will be on Study Leave from December 25 through December 30
- I will be on Vacation out of the country from January 6 through January 13
- I will be on Vacation visiting family in Canada from February 5 through February 11

Monthly Report – December 19, 2023
UUCOD Secretary Claudia Simmons

1. I was present and took the minutes of the November 14, 2023, Board Minutes. The draft has been prepared, reviewed by Board members and is awaiting approval at the December Board Meeting.
2. On November 29, 2023, I had an appointment with the Notary Public at Pacific Premier Bank on El Paseo to have my signature notarized for the Charles Schwab financial document. I returned the properly signed document to Treasurer Jerry L'Hommedieu.

Director at Large Board Report December 2023

Hospitality

- As previously reported, Both Sandy and Margaret have decided to step down from their current roles as heads of Hospitality effective June 30th. They continue to reach out to people to try and identify a replacement, but at this point no one has stepped forward. They have also shared with Linda Savard all the volunteers who generally support Hospitality. June 30th is a hard stop for them.
- As reported last month, Hospitality had a budget shortfall last. This year the budget is \$600, and they have already spent approximately \$425. They have submitted a request for a budget of approximately \$1,000 or \$20 per Sunday.

Human Resources

- Here is a brief update on Ian's Ministerial Assessment form and process. My intent is to share some initial thinking with the Board though we are still working through the particulars.
- Rev. Ian and I met on December 13th to continue crafting a Ministerial Evaluation Form (assessment). Our next meeting is scheduled for January 3rd.
- Though still a work in progress, we are recommending that there be an annual review beginning each July 1. Two major components of this process will be Ian's goals and objectives for the year and the mechanism by which an evaluation team will collect, review, and report feedback.
- The initial recommendation for what would be included on the assessment form would be Ian's objectives or essential functions, core competencies and short and long-term goals.
- Ian will be preparing a draft Assessment Form that will include these three areas that we will discuss at our January meeting.
- In tandem to crafting the assessment form, we will be recommending the structure of the Evaluation Team, their role and who will be a part of this team. There are a number of different models that Ian and I have reviewed and will be discussed at our next meeting.
- We will then present our recommendation to the Board for their review and approval.

By-Laws

- No activity in October.

AB-506

- Completed

Covid-19 Policy and Protocol

- Completed

Attitude of Gratitude

- Prepared and mailed on November 22nd 16 thank you cards to the following individuals:

- Marty Gronewald
 - Charlotte Bibo
 - Pam Bibo
 - Ginger Hemingway
 - Barb Storms
 - Rod Belshee
 - Mel Wilkenson
 - Sue Caspari
 - Reuben Gallardo
 - Charles DeFlores
 - Randy Steele
 - Claudia Simmons
 - Jerry L'Hommedieu
 - Katy Faas
 - Margaret Manson and Sandy Sladen
 - Dave Emerson
- Bob Rancourt agreed to send a thank you card to Jack Fitzsimmons (for obvious reasons 😊).
 - I could not locate Katy Barnes nor was I able to obtain a name and address to send a card to The Living Desert or the California Plant Society. I will continue to track down that information and send cards this month.

Sunday Service Welcome

- Conducted the welcome at the December 3rd service.
- At the December 10th service assisted Rev. Ian in lighting the Hanukkah candles and recited the blessings in Hebrew and English.

**Submitted by:
Walter Gendell
Director at Large
December 19, 2023**

Carol McDaniel
Director at Large
12-19-2023

These are the committees I follow.

AV

- The Garden Celebration, 12-3-23, was filmed.
- The opening of the Habitat Garden, 1-7-24, will be filmed.
- More working members are needed. Cheryl has joined the audio team. Linda has added programming to what she does.

FACILITIES

- The chair, Mel, plans to leave this year. She will co-chair for a year if someone is found. The Sacred Grounds people were asked with no takers.
- Sacred Grounds says they take responsibility for their grounds for 2 years and then turn over the responsibility to Facilities. Facilities discussed what this means. For example, does this mean their people will join facilities?
- The lobby pendant light needs a new motion sensor.
- The sanctuary pendants have been cleaned (thanks Steve).
- The women's bathroom has a new fluorescent light.
- The kitchen closet has been cleaned/rearranged (thanks Mel)
- Jerry reported on what's happening with Sacred Grounds. Thanks, Jerry for all your manual work inside and outside UUCOD. Jerry works TU. mornings and he welcomes others to join him.
- The Palo Verde trees were lightly pruned. The Tx. Ebony and other trees in the back portion of our property were overly pruned. Help is needed to remove debris.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- We lost our co-chair, Gloria. Denise will look for another.
- Holiday activities are going well. 60** food boxes were filled by members and given to the Migrant Ed. (CVUSD) Program. They also received \$1100.00 in gift cards to buy food. (thanks Bill & Joni). The monies collected funded \$2650.00 in gift cards to buy toys for (CVUSD) Migrant Ed. children and \$1300.00 in gift cards for SafeHouse/Harrison House young adult residents. Also, 10 unwrapped toys were donated to Galilee.
- Social Justice has found volunteers do not want to be committee members but to work on "A (time limited) Project".
- In the Upcoming months, SJ will be working on "Get Out the Vote" and contacting Congress to support John Lewis' Voting Rights Act. They also hope to

support Safe Schools Desert Cities Scholarships by naming a UUCOD scholarship in Gloria's name.

** compared to 46 boxes last year

Carol McDaniel
12-19-23

December 11, 2023

TO: UUCOD Board of Directors

FR: Julia Bell
Rob DuWors

RE: Charitable Bequest Soft Launch Results

We are writing to update you on the results of our charitable bequest soft launch. As you will remember, our charge was to reach out to the Board of Directors and Finance Committee Members to see if they have made a charitable bequest to the UUCOD.

Board of Directors: Alberg-Burbank, Hoag, Gendell, L'Hommedieu, McDaniel, Rancourt, Simmons
Finance Committee: Bell, Eager, Beaman, Hemingway, Hoover, Masco

Results

We reached out to members of the Board of Directors and Finance Committee which, in some cases, caused us to gather information on their spouses. A **pledge unit** is either an individual or a couple. In some cases, couples are counted as individuals because their estate planning is done separately. *We are only reporting on the results we gathered for the Board of Directors and Finance Committee in our summary statistics that follow.*

- Six pledge units were prompted by our outreach to think about making a charitable bequest to the UUCOD. We will follow up with them in March.
- Four pledge units said they will not be making a charitable bequest to the UUCOD. One of them was open to a follow up call in March.
- Three pledge units had or now have made a charitable bequest to the UUCOD. These bequests are made in the form of either a specific dollar amount or a percentage of their final estate.

Observations

- Our outreach prompted many people to acknowledge that they need to work on their estate plans and consider if they will include the UUCOD.
- People have different reactions to our request for information. Some people may not want to provide a photocopy of their estate plan documents.
- This project will be ongoing and require ongoing follow-up.
- The request for education/information was not as extensive as anticipated.

We plan to move forward with the full launch of this initiative in March. Please let us know if you need any further information.

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Sacred Grounds Report to the Board December 2023

Transitioning from Creating to Outreach!

Gardens

The Celebration Garden Blessing and Dedication on December 3 was a great success, well attended and with great responses.

The Desert Canyon Habitat received the National Wildlife Federation certification as a Sacred Ground. This will be presented to Bob at the Jan 7 dedication.

John applied the final coat of sealant and the Celebration Garden complete! The Desert Canyon Habitat is complete except for interpretive signage and additional small rocks. The first batch of interpretive signs is on order and the second is being designed. The expenses for these two gardens will come in around \$4,000 under budget.

Work Parties

We have had good success getting work parties for installing the new gardens, but the Tuesday work parties are usually just Jerry. That is not sustainable, especially over the next couple of months as schismus grass need pulling. We are discussing organizing some Weed Pulls on Tuesday mornings in January and February to see if we can jump start the Tuesday work parties again.

Dedication of the Desert Canyon Habitat, January 7

The Dedication is shaping up to be a major event. Guest Speakers are Dr Cameron Barrows, Lisha Astorga, and Elizabeth Ogren Erickson. At least seven organizations will participate in the Exhibitor Fair afterwards on the labyrinth (California Native Plant Society, Desert Strawhouse, Friends of Desert Mountains, Community Science Collaborative, the Living Desert, Oswit Land Trust, Chuckwalla National Monument).

The service and dedication are one combined event, led by Rev Barbara Fast – attendees will join in the sanctuary for the first 40-45 minutes, then will join a silent procession to the labyrinth for the completion of the dedication. The Order of Worship is nearly finalized.

Invitations are circulating in the conservation communities and we may get a large draw. There is substantial buzz already. Diane C and Vikki have started a substantial publicity and social media effort for the general public focused on the Dedication event. An opinion piece was printed in the UkenReport, a local online news site.

We will set up the community room with a Zoom TV for overflow, and should arrange as many chairs as we can. We could have anywhere from 30-60 guests, in addition to perhaps 100 members and friends. Newsletter articles will encourage members to come early, and encourage those who are able to park on the street and leave closer parking for people who need it. Ushers will need to encourage people to not leave isolated empty chairs.

This is a major Outreach opportunity to greet new visitors since attendees will experience the whole UUCOD worship service, not just the Habitat dedication. The Board and Membership should staff up and plan accordingly as there will be many new faces to greet before the service and afterwards on the labyrinth. This event will heighten our visibility in the Valley, and perhaps some of the attendees will want to return.

Randy will coordinate refreshment tables just outside the entrance to the labyrinth, and Exhibitor tables and chairs along the back (north) edge of the labyrinth. Diana will coordinate to-go boxes of coffee, cups and baked goods. Michael will provide a PA system for speakers at the labyrinth. Docents will lead tours of the Habitat.

Needs: We need someone to video the labyrinth portion for posting to the website later. We need someone to stay at the labyrinth during the sanctuary portion for security.

Fundraising

Diana solicited donations in a single Constant Contact email to the full 300 subscribers.
<Diana insert an update>

Diana completed an application for a competitive award of \$500 or \$1000 from Interfaith Power & Light.

Our current guess is that the fundraising to date, combined with the underspend this Fall, will give a Reserve balance just about the right size for future projects.

2024 and Beyond

We have ideas for up to five native habitats, year-round bloom, a green wall to shade the sanctuary back wall, trees to screen between Key Largo and the retention pond, and a mediation garden. The Steering Committee expects to review these ideas in January, discuss them and others with the congregation (tentatively Jan 28) set priorities, and get Board approval and start planning in March. We will provide budget estimates in late January.

We are also ready to partner up with any of the other UUCOD Committees for classes or events in support of our value of the Interdependent Web of Life, though nothing is planned at this time.

Attachments:

the Invitation to the Desert Canyon Habitat Dedication (pdf for redistribution).



Sacred Grounds

Unitarian Universalist
Church of the Desert

Please join the dedication of a new native species demonstration garden in the Coachella Valley on January 7, 2024.

This garden serves as a beautiful example of using native plantings in our communities and backyards, helping our native pollinators, birds, lizards and small mammals, while saving precious water. The Desert Canyon Habitat garden spans 7,500 square feet, and incorporates 25 tons of boulders and over a hundred native plants on the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert grounds.

The Dedication features several notable speakers, including Dr. Cameron Barrows of UCR Center for Conservation Biology, Lisha Astorga of Desert Strawhouse, and Reverend Barbara Fast. Exhibitors include the California Native Plant Society, The Living Desert, Oswit Land Trust and the Community Science Collaborative. The Desert Strawhouse will have native plants for sale.

The National Wildlife Federation has bestowed its **Sacred Ground certification**.

WHERE: 72425 Via Vail, Rancho Mirage, 92270

WHEN: Sunday, January 7, 2024 at 10:00 am



Draft letter of Support for Chuckwalla National Monument

To: President Biden

cc: Secretary Deb Haaland, BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning, CEQ Director Brenda Mallory, Senator Padilla, Senator Butler, Representative Ruiz, Representative Calvert

Dear President Biden:

We are writing to express our support for the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument to preserve high value public lands in Riverside and Imperial counties.

***[Please add a few sentences of personalized comments here]* explain how the monument ties into our UU principles and values.**

Designation of the Chuckwalla National Monument is a critical step towards ensuring equitable access to nature for the residents of Riverside and Imperial Counties. Studies have shown that there are many physical and psychological wellness benefits in being outdoors and in nature, however, according to a recent report from the Hispanic Access Foundation, people of color, low-income communities, and families with children are most likely to be deprived of the benefits that nature provides. A National Monument adjacent to the underserved communities in the Coachella Valley would alleviate the gap people of color face in accessing wild spaces. Each and every one of us should have the opportunity to spend time in our mountains, navigate their slot canyons, and breathe the clean mountain air.

Furthermore, protecting Chuckwalla National Monument would be a vital step towards safeguarding public lands, water sources, and wildlife. Chuckwalla serves as a refuge for wildlife, many of which are already struggling due to habitat loss and climate change. The area is rich in biodiversity, from the imperiled desert tortoise to the elusive desert bighorn sheep to the charismatic chuckwalla lizard. Designating the national monument would connect seven existing wilderness areas and provide connectivity to Joshua Tree National Park, which would preserve critical wildlife movement corridors and prevent further degradation of wildlife habitat.

Creating protected areas like Chuckwalla National Monument is crucial for maintaining ecosystem resilience and ensuring the long-term survival of native species. The monument would be a significant contribution to our state and

nationwide goals to conserve 30 percent of public lands and coastal waters by 2030 and mitigate the climate and biodiversity crises.

I call upon President Biden to designate Chuckwalla National Monument to help reach the “30x30” goal. By doing so, he can leave an enduring legacy that prioritizes the health of our lands, waters, and wildlife and the wellbeing of future generations.

Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert
Board of Directors
Rancho Mirage, California

THE CALIFORNIA DESERT REGION

ECONOMIC BENEFITS



© Andrea Iniguez

The Economic Link Between Conserved Lands and Local Communities

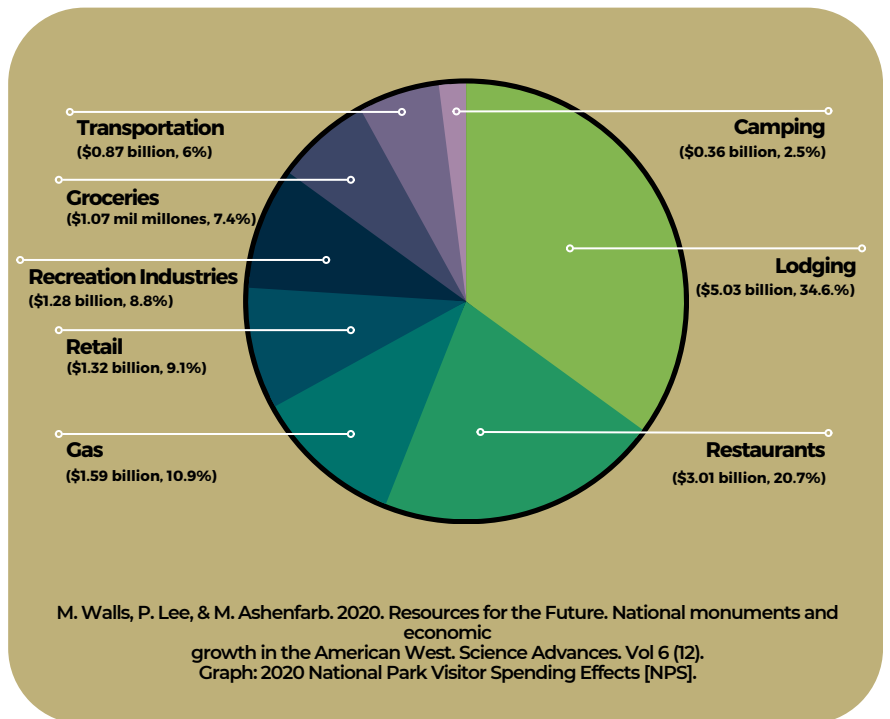
Studies have demonstrated an association between conservation of public lands and a significant boon to surrounding local economies.

Tourism: Economic Driver in the Desert

The California Desert region is experiencing a rapid escalation in tourist enthusiasm and visitation that has driven revenue for local economies.

Jobs and Desert Visitation

Tourism is an industry, and as desert visitation rapidly expands, so too has job creation and business opportunities for local resident who support related sectors such as business, finance, construction, and health.



DESERT CONSERVATION CONFERS ECONOMIC BENEFITS. IT'S MORE THAN SAVING BEAUTIFUL PLACES.

Monument designation has a positive and statistically significant average increase of approximately 10% on the total number of establishments [businesses] and 8.5% on the total number of jobs in Zip Code Tabulation Areas within 25 km of the 14 Mountain West designated national monuments analyzed across a 25-year time period.



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SUMMARY POINTS: ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF DESERT CONSERVATION

- In a 2020 study published by the Washington, D.C. based think tank Resources for the Future, authors reviewed data across 8 states in the Mountain West to estimate the economic impacts of 14 monument designations over a 25-year period. They concluded that monuments resulted in greater average number of establishments and jobs in proximity to monuments; increased average establishment growth rate; and had no effect on mining and other industries that use public lands.
- The National Park Service 2020 Report on NPS Visits, Spending, and Economic Contributions to Local Economies noted that for Joshua Tree National Park, visitation of 2,399,542 guests conveyed \$121,857,000 spent in local economies; 1,512 jobs; and \$60,065,000 in labor income consisting of employee wages, salaries and payroll benefits, as well as the incomes of proprietors that are supported by NPS visitor spending.
- Visit California's Economic Impact of Travel report for 2021 indicated Local Tax Revenue of \$293,000 for the state's Desert Region, supporting community benefits such as safety, fire, recreation, and library services.
- Joshua Tree National Park and other desert public lands have experienced a dramatic increase in visitation across the last decade as the public has enthusiastically discovered our desert region. For instance, between 2011 and 2021, visitation at JTNP increased from 1,396,237 to 3,064,000 – a 119% increase.
- A 2014 report [ECONorthwest] noted economic contributions of Quiet Recreation Visits within 50 miles of recreation sites on BLM-managed lands within California. Total Direct Spending was \$243,938,853. In inflation-adjusted dollars for 2022, that amount today would be \$305,182,203.
- Tourists to Imperial County generate an estimated \$347.6 million (2016; \$428.9 million adjusted for 2022) in the County and support more than 4,700 direct jobs, about 7 percent of total employment in the County.



 Bob Wick

National monuments and economic growth in the American West. 2020. [Link](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aay8523)

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aay8523>

2020 National Park Visitor Spending Effects. Economic contributions to local communities, states, and the nation. 2021. NPS. [Link](#)

Economic Impact of Travel in California 2012-2021. Visit California. 2022. Dean Runyon and Associates. [Link](#)

National Park Service Stats. National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics. [Link](#)

The Economic Value of 'Quiet Recreation' on BLM Lands. 2017. Pew Charitable Trusts. [Link](#)

Updated Summary: The Economic Importance of National Monuments to Local Communities. 2017. Headwaters Economics. [Link](#)

Imperial County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. [Link](#)



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