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# Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert

## Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2024

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### Attending:

A meeting of the UUCOD Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024.

**Board Members attending in person:** Bob Rancourt, President, Julia Alberg-Burbank, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Fran Hoag, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Jerry L’Hommedieu, Treasurer, Claudia Simmons, Secretary, Walter Gendell, Director at Large, Carol McDaniel, Director at Large.

**Board Member Attending Online:** Rev. Ian W. Riddell, Minister

**Others Present Online:** Rod Belshee, Diana Leslie

### 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.

### Process Moderation

Process monitor was assigned to Jerry L’Hommedieu.

### Consent Agenda

- The Board made a motion to approve the January 16, 2024, Board Meeting Minutes [Moved by Walter Gendell and seconded by Jerry L’Hommedieu]. Approved.
- The Board made a motion to approve the February 24, 2024, Board Retreat Minutes [Moved by Jerry L’Hommedieu and seconded by Carol McDaniel]. Approved.

### Voices of the Congregation

- Review and Consideration of Appreciation Project
  - Fran Hoag reported that the community art project is moving forward.

### Old Business

- Review, Consideration, and Approval of Rev. Riddell’s Sabbatical Leave Proposal.
  - Sabbatical to be taken July and August of 2025 and July and August 2026.

- Motion from the Board voted to approve Rev. Riddell's Sabbatical Leave Proposal. [Moved by Claudia Simmons and seconded by Fran Hoag]. Approved.
- Review, Consideration and Approval of FY 2024-2025 Budget.
  - Reviewed the budget.
  - Will look at "Fill the Gap Fundraiser" at some point during the next fiscal year.
  - Approved Budget will be presented at Congregational Meeting.
  - Board voted to approve the FY 24-25 Budget [Moved by Fran Hoag and seconded by Walter Gendell]. Approved.
- Review and Planning of Annual Business Meeting April 28, 2024.
  - Agenda to be discussed: State of the Church, State of the Committees, Elections, Budget
  - 15 days before meeting, notice needs to be mailed to congregants.
  - Figure out how voting will happen with Election Buddy.
  - Bob, Jerry, and Carol will work in planning the Annual Business Meeting.
- Nomination and Designation of Attitude of Gratitude Note Recipients
  - It was requested that thank you notes be sent to the End of Pledge Drive pizza party helpers. Fran Hoag will provide Walter Gendell with a list of helpers.

## Unfinished Business

- Review and Consideration of Ad Hoc Communications Team Creation Committee
  - Fran Hoag, Rev Ian and Bob Rancourt, and Pam Bibb have been meeting and working on the status. Decided *not* to create a new team. Rather team is referred to as a working group. Discussing how to improve outreach, social media including a presence on Instagram. Will also consider drawing from Sacred Grounds' outreach process.
- Review, Consideration, and Discussion of the Membership Committee's Internet Church Directory
  - Membership put out an email requesting a vote at the Annual Meeting.
  - The Board feels that there are still many questions that need to be answered before this project is voted on.
  - Bob Rancourt agreed to talk with the Membership Committee to express the Board's concerns and make suggestions.
  - The Board would like to have Membership do a presentation of some sort.
  - It would also like the project to have a definition of who owns this project going forward, what is the online program that is being used, who oversees the program, who will the administrators be, how will the online directory and MemInfo be coordinated to reflect the same information.
  - How will 'friends' and members who do not currently access the computer have their information input into the new system?
  - It was agreed by the Board that an online member directory is important going forward.
  - The Board is asking for another 4-5 months to review the system and any proposed guidelines.
- Review and Discussion of Board Reading: "Transforming Conflict: The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil" (Ch. 7).
  - Postponed review of Chapter 7 until next month.

- Read Chapter 8 for next month's discussion as well.

## New Business

- Review and Discussion of Monthly Reports
  - See attached detailed reports.
- Review, Consideration, and Approval of Sacred Grounds Initiative's 2024 Projects Proposal
  - Rod Belshee highlighted the Sacred Grounds Board Report: There was a Garden Tour Saturday, March 17, 2024. 75 people came to UUCOD's Sacred Grounds. Rod had a conversation with a woman at the event who said that she is interested in doing a summer environmental education program for youth and was wondering about the possibility of holding the program at the church. She would like to propose a 6–8-week summer program.
    - These conversations are just at a preliminary or potential stage currently.
    - Rod asked the Board who the primary point person would be to interact with this person. It was felt that Rod would be the perfect person at this point, however, Rev. Ian asked that he include Pam Bibo in this conversation regarding logistics and cost to rent space. June through August is the timeframe this person is looking for.
  - Sacred Grounds would like Board input and/or approval for the next year on the following areas.
    - (Reference Map of Sacred Grounds landscape proposal) Sacred Grounds proposes to move forward with the Creosote Scrub, which would be paid out of Sacred Grounds funds.
    - (Reference Map of Sacred Grounds landscape proposal) Sacred Grounds proposes that trees be replaced along Key Largo to make the entrance more attractive as well as limit foot traffic through the dirt in that area. Sacred Grounds would absorb the costs to plant and irrigate the area, however, the maintenance and any repairs would fall to the church's operating budget.
    - (Reference Map of Sacred Grounds landscape proposal) Sacred Grounds made a non-specific proposal to create a Year-Round Blooming area. This is a concept that would continue over multiple years to make the entrance more attractive. Jerry and Jack will help figure out what types of blooming plants would add to the attractiveness of the entryway, while not adding to maintenance or the use of more water.
    - Sacred Grounds is looking for a concept approval for year around bloom. They will get back to the Board with a firmer proposal later.
    - A motion from the Board was made to approve the Creosote Scrub and the concept for the Year-Round Blooming area. The tree replacement along Key Largo will be tabled at this time. All voted and approved as set forth herein.

## Process Moderation

- Jerry L'Hommedieu reported that the Board Meeting ran overtime however, everyone had been heard.

## Chalice Extinguishment

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

## Adjournment

- Bob adjourned the regular Board meeting at 7:40 pm

## Respectfully Submitted,



Claudia L. Simmons, Secretary

Date Approved: April 16, 2024

## Attachments

Monthly Reports  
Sacred Grounds Update  
Sacred Grounds Proposal  
Fiscal Year 24-25 Budget

# President's Report



MEETING DATE:	<b>March 19, 2024</b>
REPORTING PERIOD:	<b>Feb. 21 to Mar. 18, 2024</b>
TYPE:	<b>Monthly Board</b>
AUTHOR:	<b>Bob Rancourt</b>

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**

Members are continuing to study neurodivergence and possible accessibility recommendations to enhance diversity and help our beloved community continue to work on being more welcoming to all.

## **Leadership Development Committee**

President Ex Officio Savard reports that several volunteer openings persist. Such opportunities include the next Second Vice President and positions on the A/V Team, Leadership Development Committee, Hospitality Team, and Membership Committee.

## **Personnel Advisory Committee**

Rev. Riddell and Walter are finishing up the draft of the ministerial evaluation form and process for the new Settled Minister. The Board recently referred for recommendations several possible employee policy changes.

## **Additional Information**

This month's President's Column discussed equity (Rev. Riddell's monthly service theme) and in particular the new proposed UUA equity value and associated pending amendments. The Board's Ad Hoc Communications Team Creation Committee continues to meet and work. At the last meeting, the decision was made not to create a new communications committee but rather to exist as a working group with tasks assigned to various volunteers. Finally, brainstorming the outline of a new fundraiser to help defray next year's existing budget deficit has begun.

To: UUCOD Board  
From: 1st Vice President, Julia Alberg-Burbank  
RE: March 2024 Board Report

**Church Council:**

A robust and successful Church Council was conducted on March 9, 2024. This well attended hybrid event featured inter-committee sharing about success and needs. By and large, each committee diligently worked at accomplishing goals on behalf of the church. Universally, the committees expressed the need for more people on their various teams. Some initial discussion touched on the topics of consolidating committees and embracing dynamic methods allowing for project completion over committee membership commitments. Additionally, the *church calendar* for 24-25 was established and key events were reserved.

The meeting also marked the beginning of a reexamination of our vision and mission. Another robust discussion was had and Rev. Ian facilitated in a manner that all were heard and wonderful data was gathered.

**Committee Roster:**

Following the Church Council, I created a board document in the shared drive that lists the committee chairs, their contact information and committee members, where it was available to me. I am requesting help making sure I have all the members of the various committees. This document is intended to be a living and shared document that can be edited for future church years. Ahead of the first Church Council of 24-25, I will make a copy of the document and make the needed changes.

**Denominational Affairs:**

Jane Zaun will continue to promote the ease and importance of attendance at this year's UUA General Assembly. The on-line only GA will be voting on changes to Article II, in addition to offering a variety of workshops and services.

Currently, we have four congregants attending GA and all three delegate spots are filled.

**Miscellaneous:**

I reached out to Jane Betts-Stover to begin a dialog around a possible Patio Sale in April of 2025.

I was worship associate for services on March 9, 2024

**Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> VP report to the Board**  
**March 19, 2024**

**Stewardship**

**Outreach:** As Sacred Grounds reported, 75 people from the Desert Horticultural Society Garden Tour visited our grounds. Each was greeted warmly and were led on a tour of their choosing. The conversations with our docents lengthened their stay. A few people also walked the labyrinth and many said that they would bring a friend in the future. Upon touring the grounds a non-profit is interested in renting our facilities for a Summer Youth Environmental Day Camp.

**Growing Connections To Our CommUnity :** The topic for March is Equity.

**Pledge Drive Celebration:** The Pizza Party Celebration on March 3 was a total success. Community building over food generated great conversation. People lingered and there was no problem getting volunteers to help with clean-up. They just jumped right in.

**Joint Membership Stewardship meeting** will be held on April 4. This is the initial discussion on merging the 2 committees.

**Appetizer Potluck for “Snowbirds”:** I attended the potluck and had warm conversations with Friends that I hope to reconnect with when they return.

**Lifespan**

I met with Rev Ian and Diana to discuss classes for next year. See Rev Ian’s Board report for a summary of the meeting.

**Membership**

**New Member Orientation Classes** were conducted on March 10 and 17. Six to eight people attended and an undefined number will sign the Membership Book on March 31. The Membership Committee meeting is on March 21 and they may have more information then.

**Instant Church Directory:** The link to the directory was emailed to the congregation via Constant Contact on March 13. The email included instructions on how to edit one’s personal profile and add photos. A new email address was created to allow members to ask questions: [directory@uucod.org](mailto:directory@uucod.org). Received mail is automatically forwarded to the committee members in charge of the project.

**Communications Working Group**

I met with the members of the team as we developed ideas to support and improve internal and external communications.

*Submitted by Fran Hoag*



## UUCOD Treasurer's Report February 2023

As of February 29, UUCOD held cash deposits of \$293,966.56 which includes \$216,709.04 invested with UUA and a CD with Pacific Premier Bank. Of the total amount, \$244,671.37 is held in either dedicated or restricted funds. This leaves \$49,295.19 in available unrestricted funds; down from \$59,323.91 in January.

February's Share the Plate program resulted in a donation of \$615 for FIND Food Bank. A total of \$1742 was sent to Safe Schools Desert Cities in February for the January Share the Plate. UUCOD paid \$750 for a table at the Harvey Milk Breakfast and has received payment for two registrations thus far. Expenses of \$24,179 and revenue of \$14,244 resulted in a loss for February of \$9,935.

Our annual pledge drive ended on February 29 with pledge commitments for FY 24 - 25 totaling \$189,264. The goal was \$195,000. A luncheon was hosted by the Stewardship Committee on March 3 to celebrate the end of our pledge drive.

With the pledge drive over, the FY 24 – 25 Budget is essentially completed although there is a revenue shortfall of approximately \$19,616. Preliminary discussions have been held to identify means to remedy the deficit .

Jerry L'Hommedieu  
March 7, 2024

## **Minister's Report to the UUCOD Board**

March 19, 2024

The Rev. Ian W. Riddell

Before my summary I want to share an update on my health as it is very obvious that I've been struggling with a persistent and, at times, overwhelming cough. The cough has had a significant impact on my sleep and physical wellness for the past several weeks. I have been in ongoing conversation with my medical providers to help alleviate the cough and find out what is going on. Some testing is happening early this week and I am hopeful that that and the quieter time of Study Leave week will help deal with this issue. I am grateful for the flexibility and care shown to me by congregants over the past weeks.

*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. Our focus at our upcoming April meeting will be on developing an ongoing plan for reaching out to and connecting with "shut ins" – those who are not physically coming to the congregation and who may not find it easy to participate online.
- The Care Team has worked to create a format and process for our new Circles of Caring Energy which may be requested by congregants who are facing surgery or serious illness or making crucial decisions. We have worked to ensure that we only share information if we are given consent about what is wanted to be shared and with who. We have seen these circles already bring comfort and a strong sense of connection to congregants dealing with surgery and illness.
- 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.

### **B. Administration, Governance, and Staff**

- I meet weekly with Pam Bibo and Jim Tong to check in on work expectations and how things are going.
- The Committee on Ministry met this month and continued to work on some plans for several projects we'll be exploring in the coming months, including the CoM's involvement in ministerial evaluations.
- We are working on finding two new members for the CoM: one chosen by the minister and one by the Board..

- As usual, I met with President Bob Rancourt and First Vice President July Alberg-Burbank to plan the Board agenda, as well as discuss the upcoming Board retreat and Church Council meeting.
- I met with Bob Rancourt, Jerry L'Hommedieu, Julia Bell, and Chris Eager again to review the draft budget for 2024-2025.
- I participated in the Board Retreat and in the Church Council meeting. At both meetings, I engaged attendees in beginning exercises aimed at crafting a new mission and vision for the congregation over the coming months.
- I was heartened by the connections being built by the Church Council—and also by the step we took to begin the calendaring process for the next church year this early. I hope this will enable us to plan more carefully and avoid unseen conflicts as the year goes along.

### **C. Membership and Committees**

- I meet monthly with the DIB Ministry team. As a consequence of our learning around inclusion and access, we have been reaching out to various constituencies in the congregation (the over-80 group, BIOPOC folks, for example) to get input from them on what they see as accessibility needs that the congregation might address better.
- I met with our Communications Task Force as we discussed how to live into the congregation's Communications Policy and better use multiple media to get our message out to our congregants and our neighbors in the Valley. We discussed how to better use Facebook and (possibly) Instagram. We agreed that creating a brand new full committee was not sensible at this time, but that we would continue to work together as a task force to do the work of communication better.

### **D. Lifespan Faith-Development**

- The Chalice Circles continue to follow our monthly themes based on the newly articulated Article II values.
- I met with Lifespan leaders Fran Hoag and Diana Leslie to begin planning our offerings for the coming church year. Sacred Grounds will be sponsoring several activities including sessions aimed at connecting spiritual growth to our sacred grounds. There is also a felt need for a class to help participants develop and deepen their understanding of their own theologies, beliefs, and practices. I feel that the curriculum we have used for this in the past (Building Your Own Theology) has become out of date and so I am researching other possibilities. We are also exploring the possibility of running a UUA curriculum on transforming worship which I hope will be participated in by most of the Worship Team as well as anyone else interested..

### **E. Worship**

- We have service leaders planned through the end of May.

- 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.
- I led or participated in worship several times:
  - February 25 — Give and Take: Yarn and Relationship with Ginger Hemingway as Worship Associate.
  - March 3 — Expanding Inclusion: Equity and Accessibility [A2: Equity] with Bryna Blum as Worship Associate [our pledge drive kick-off service]
  - March 10 — Thought and Action: Al-Ghazali and Adams with Julia Alberg-Burbank as Worship Associate.
- We welcomed Michael Mullins into the pulpit on March 17 to talk about his Laundry Love program and I served as Worship Associate/Host.
- Our choir under Jim Tong has quickly become a highlight of the worship services when they sing. I see and hear new energy, connection, and skill each time they sing. I also want to hold up the impact of adding percussion to the choir and other music in a service on March 10.

#### **F. Denominational Activities**

- I regularly consult with local and regional colleagues on issues affecting our congregations.
- 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 also mentor another new minister as he works through his Preliminary Fellowship. Both of these mentoring roles together take about 2.5 hours a month of my time.
- I serve on the nomination committee of my UU Ministers Association chapter and will coordinate worship for our upcoming retreat.
- I will be attending a retreat with my chapter of the UU Ministers Association in Phoenix March 18-21.

#### **G. Prophetic Outreach, Interfaith Activities, and Local Collaboration**

- I participated in the gathering of the Desert Interfaith Council this month. Michael Mullins presented his work to the group and we continued our discussion of the future of the DIC.
- I plan to reach out to the Coachella Valley Collaborative to learn how our congregation might get involved in this organization focused on providing care, aid, and services to those in need in the Coachella Valley

#### **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 am grateful for this week of Study Leave from March 18 to March 24.

in peace and deep love

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dee", is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

**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 Monday, March 18, through Sunday, March 24. During that time I will travel to Phoenix for the spring UUMA Chapter

Monthly Report – March 19, 2024  
UUCOD Secretary Claudia Simmons

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1. I was present and took the minutes of the February 20, 2024, Board Minutes. The draft has been prepared, reviewed by Board members and is awaiting approval at the March 2024 Board Meeting.
2. I was present and took minutes of the February 24, 2024, Board Retreat. Minutes were distributed to the Board and posted to the Google Shared Drive.
3. I was present and took minutes of the March 9, 2024, Church Council Meeting. Minutes were distributed to the Board and posted to the Google Shared Drive.

## **Board Member at Large Report March 2024**

### **Hospitality**

- There were no issues or concerns but the search continues to find a replacement for them by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Human Resources**

- At the February Board meeting Ian shared with the Board a draft of the Ministerial Assessment form.
- At the March 12<sup>th</sup> COM meeting the following was discussed:
  - The entire congregation would not be providing input but selected people to be recommended by COM based on developed criteria.
  - Initial assessments would be a fairly simple process and consist of a smaller group of evaluators and targeted to provide Ian feedback most useful to him on an annual basis.
  - Initial evaluation would be a balance between quantitative ratings and qualitative comments. The assessment evaluation form is still being developed.
  - A more extensive assessment process would occur every three to four years to include the larger congregational members.
- The evaluation review process is still being formulated. It is anticipated that a draft process will be shared with the Board at their March meeting.

### **Attitude of Gratitude**

- In my absence Carol McDaniel handled the thank you cards for February.

### **Worship Associate**

- I have joined the Worship Associate Committee and will make my debut in the pulpit in June!

**Submitted by:**

**Walter Gendell**

**Board Member at Large**

**March 13, 2024**

**From:** CAM cmcdaniel1@dc.rr.com

**Subject:** Director at Large1, 3-20-2024 Report

**Date:** March 17, 2024 at 7:52 PM

**To:** president@uucod.org, vicepresident1@uucod.org, vicepresident2@uucod.org, treasurer@uucod.org, minister@uucod.org, directoratlarge2@uucod.org, directoratlarge1@uucod.org

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The three committee's I check on are:

**AV**

- . Tom Burbank has joined the audio part of the team. He has other responsibilities but will work intermittently.
- >Margo Perry is learning the visual side.
- >Volunteers are still needed.
- >Rod will be adding a plug with the other switches (outside cry-room wall) to eliminate wires that need to be walked over.

**Facilities:**

- >This month a dishwasher was clogged and fixed. Both are old so remember all food must be removed before placing them into dishwasher.
- >The ice maker sprung a waterfall and we had a frozen pond on the floor of the freezer. It is being melted and will be fixed (3-18-24).
- >More supplies, paper and plastic, are being bought. We are checking with Rancho Mirage to see if they have composting bags. Hopefully, Green Sanctuary will be revived.
- > Who is in charge? 1) Facilities or Sacred Gardens; 2) Facilities or Worship
- 1)We need to know so the gardener is contacted. His days vary and he needs to know what we want. For example, don't rake up the wildflowers!
- 2) Facilities re-arranges the chairs, but they do not cover the piano or put the Chalice away.
- >Carol McDaniel will be co-chairing with Mel this coming year.
- >Volunteers are still needed.

**Social Justice:**

- >Thank you, Rev. Ian, for advertising our Formula on the Fourth information.
- > We need Share the Plate Applicants for the up-coming year.
- >The day/time we are working at Galilee is now Wed., March 27th, from 3-4 o'clock. Those who wish a ride should arrive at UUCOD before 2:00.
- > We've added laundry days to our April calendar.
- > Volunteers are still needed.

Last month's gratitude cards were slowly sent out (through this week).

Carol McDaniel, Director at Large  
3-20-24



**From:** treasurer@uucod.org  
**Subject:** Instant Church Directory  
**Date:** March 18, 2024 at 5:36 PM  
**To:** Bob Rancourt (he/him/his) president@uucod.org, vicepresident1@uucod.org, vicepresident2@uucod.org, secretary@uucod.org, directoratlarge1@uucod.org, directoratlarge2@uucod.org, Rev. Ian Riddell minister@uucod.org  
**Cc:** treasurer@uucod.org

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Dear fellow board members. I wanted to draw your attention to the email we received on March 13 regarding the Instant Church Directory pilot program. I didn't see this topic on the Agenda for the upcoming board meeting but the email indicated that *"at the congregational meeting this spring, members will be asked to decide which version to keep, print or online."*

I reviewed a number of documents relating to this topic beginning with the minutes of the July 2023 board meeting, a summary offered by the Membership Committee last year, and the recent email which seems to announce the official launch of testing by potential users. An excerpt of the board minutes reflect the following:

- *"The proposal is to conduct a trial version of the membership directory online over the next year, to be completed by the Annual Meeting in 2024.*
- *Congregation will be surveyed in some fashion at the end of the trial to help assess how it has worked out and whether to continue."*

If my memory is correct, we discussed initial testing of the church directory to begin sometime in November and for it to be completed by the annual meeting in April. I don't recall the board saying approval of the online directory would require a vote by the congregation at the annual meeting. UUCOD routinely implements new technology without congregational approval; board acceptance is generally required and sufficient.

Given the recent introduction of this new system to our Members and Friends, it seems prudent to conduct user acceptance testing for several months before any vote on the matter. I'm not aware that specific requirements were documented prior to selecting Instant Church Directory and I would recommend socializing the system to identify and address any concerns by the board and congregants in general. After the system has been vetted, the Membership Committee can make a formal proposal to the board to either approve going forward with the system implementation or continuing with our current practice.

I look forward to your comments and thoughts on this matter.

Jerry L'Hommedieu

## **Sacred Grounds Report to the Board March 2024**

### **Celebration Garden**

We continue to run into visitors who have come to see the commemorative pavers of friends, relatives and ancestors.. Most recently, the Ernst's were absolutely thrilled to discover the new Celebration Garden and see their loved one now properly honored. That is indescribably heartwarming!

### **Desert Canyon Habitat**

The Habitat plantings are in peak bloom right now. The browneyes are fading to seeds, the bluebells are at their peak, and the desert lavender is starting in. Next month will be the beavertail cactus. Get out there and enjoy it!

### **Desert Horticultural Society Garden Tour**

The Desert Canyon Habitat was featured as a “bonus” garden in the Desert Horticultural Society annual Garden Tour on March 16. The main five gardens were all close together in south Palm Springs, but this was the only native plant garden and regardless of the distance the Society wanted to feature it. Our Habitat was listed on their Garden Tour map, docents in the other gardens were trained to encourage people to come over, and the President dedicated a paragraph of her Desert Sun article on the Garden Tour to our Habitat.

We had 75 visitors! Our objectives for the Habitat are to provide habitat, to connect people to the land, and to inspire people to create habitat in their own yards. This Garden Tour was excellent for that. Many strolled through the garden, or spent time in the labyrinth. Nearly all were very interested in adding native plantings to their own yards and were inspired by how amazingly lovely the habitat can be. Many asked where they can get native plants and we referred them to Desert Strawhouse, the nursery that was so helpful to us.

While the endangered Coachella Valley milkvetch is blooming (and inspired the whole Sacred Grounds vision) we chose *not* to invite visitors up to the blow sand area, since there are not yet paths and we didn't want to trample this critical habitat. Maybe next year we will have gentle paths that tread lightly in the Blow Sand Habitat and we can invite people to see that little beauty?

### **Childrens' Environmental Camp**

Joellen Elaine was inspired by our Desert Canyon Habitat during the Garden Tour. Her vision has been to create a Children's Environmental Summer Camp, and she has been searching to find a way to make that happen. She was ecstatic that she may have found the place to host that, and would like to use our facility and grounds for a summer Children's Environmental Educational summer program. She is on a

fast track for planning and will need a dedicated contact person to make this happen. For example, she is wanting rental cost information for her budgetary planning in the next week or two.

### **Geocache Adventure Lab**

The Geocache Adventure Lab is a hit: we have had 37 reviews and garnered an unheard of 4.9 stars! The Adventure lab features the native habitat, the designation as a Sacred Ground by the National Wildlife Federation, the Peace Pole and the Labyrinth.

### **Weed Pull Parties and Tuesday work parties**

We held a Weed Pull Party in each of January, February and March. Attendance was eight, twelve, and nine people. We hope that this helps people engage more directly with the land and that they continue to come to the Tuesday Work Parties, which are now typically 3-6 people. We made great progress against the invasive schismus (Mediterranean grass) this year. Next year we might space the weed pull parties closer together to really attack the schismus, perhaps every two weeks starting in late January.

### **Lifespan opportunities**

Sacred Grounds is 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 All Existence. After the February 25 worship service congregants were asked what programs and classes they were most interested in.

Based on that input, two classes are offered this spring and both are filling rapidly. One is Diana Leslie's Deepening Your Connection to the Land, and another is Jack Fitzsimmon's nature photography.

More ideas for Fall are Backyard Native Gardens, Composting, and Mindful Recycling.

As volunteers come forward, more ideas could include children's nature education, and public events, classes and tours.

### **2024 Sacred Grounds Projects**

At the February 25 Sacred Ground congregational input meeting the Steering Committee presented several ideas to get the feedback from the congregation. That is now incorporated into the proposal that is being presented at the March 2024 Board meeting.

# Sacred Grounds Board Presentation

## March 19, 2024

### **Purpose**

- Get input and approval from the Board for 2024 Sacred Grounds projects

### **Process**

- Look forward one year (planting season is October-November)
- Steering Committee (December 2023 - February 2024)
  - Review objectives
    - Habitat, beauty, sacred space, spiritual connection to nature
  - Review every idea we have ever heard - yep every one!
  - Prioritize and propose 2024 projects and programs
- Get congregational input on ideas and priorities (February 2024)
  - Review ideas
  - Invite participation. Steering Committee membership is dynamic.
- Seek Board approval (March 2024).
  - Three projects seek approval now
  - Two will require more detail for Board approval.
- Complete design (March - est July 2024)
- Construction (September - December 2024)

### **Summary of 2023 Projects (for reference, not presented in Board Meeting)**

- Patio expansion
  - Conceived to foster community through larger coffee hour
  - \$7,000 funded by Facilities budget
  - Sacred Grounds volunteers provided project design and oversight
- Celebration Garden
  - Conceived to honor commemorative pavers
  - \$8,000, and mid-hundreds of volunteer hours to research, design, contract and implement
  - Special Dedication and Blessing event, with significant Inreach to past and current congregants
  - Many people have commemorated their own celebrations with Sacred Stones
- Desert Canyon Habitat
  - Conceived as California Naturalist Capstone project to create habitat, foster connection to the land, and inspire people to “create a national park in your backyard”
  - \$7,000, upper-hundreds of volunteer hours to design, contract, acquire and implement

- Established deep connections throughout the conservation communities in the valley
- Dedication event was a massive Outreach event (200 people)
- Our Geocache Adventure Lab is a hit: 30 reviews, 4.9 stars
- Desert Horticultural Society Garden Tour (March 16) lists the Desert Canyon Habitat as a “bonus” garden
- Mesquite south screen
  - Early planting against future residential development
  - Plants, irrigation (no paths or signage)
  - Cost and leadership: was completed as part of Desert Canyon Habitat

### Summary of Financials

- We have sufficient funds in the Sacred Grounds Reserve to cover all of the proposed 2024 projects. The current balance is \$19,229.

### Steering Committee Proposal for 2024 - Projects Requesting Approval



- Creosote Scrub Habitat

- Our next major Habitat (and the favorite for the Desert Iguanas!)
- Layout is complete, paths are sketched in, substantial plantings pre-existed and we added some additional plants and irrigation in November. Substantial weeding occurred March 12.
- We plan to add more creosote, plus desert sunflowers, verbena, and additional native plants
- Simple sand pathways lined with small rocks, irrigation, signage
- Cost: \$2,000 - \$3,000 (plants, irrigation, signage)
- Leadership: Dave E, Sue E
- Trees along Key Largo
  - Screen off the retention pond area from street and Dog Park
  - Replace original Palo Verdes that died (estimate: four). Add some shorter vegetation as well for better screening.
  - Replace failed irrigation
  - Cost \$400 - \$1,500 (plantings, irrigation)
    - *Charge to Building and Grounds budget, since this is maintenance/repair of prior landscaping.*
  - Leadership: Dave E
- Blow Sand Habitat
  - The key is preserving the endangered milkvetch. This habitat is a “light touch” project.
  - Simple sand path and signage, add a few sparse native plantings. Remove some invasive and non-native plants.
  - We might try to re-bury the exposed irrigation wiring and pipes, though in blow sand that is rather temporary.
  - Cost \$800 - \$1,500
  - Leadership: Rod B

**Steering Committee Proposal for 2024 - Proposal under development (concept previously commissioned by the Board, this is just an update)**

- Benches in Celebration Garden, Desert Canyon Habitat, and Creosote Habitat
  - The Board commissioned Denise Stevens’ task team (Jack, Walter, John) to develop a proposal for the Board
  - The benches are likely cement to fit our design aesthetic, and will have backs to encourage longer sitting.
  - A number of designs are under consideration; none are ready for presentation to the Board.
    - Designs from Home Depot, Wayfair, etc. have been dropped because they lack a back.
    - Custom designs are being considered, if they can be acquired at a reasonable cost..

- The timeline may be long - perhaps a year.
- Cost is TBD, ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000 for three.
- No Board approval is requested at this time, but the task team is open to feedback.

**Steering Committee Proposal for 2024 - Projects Requesting conceptual approval to develop design for later review and approval**

- Year round Bloom
  - Aim for year-round color and beauty near the building entrance.
  - Multi-year project, design and build in phases
  - Need landscape design – will start after conceptual Board approval.
  - Goals include beauty, low water use, and low maintenance. Not limited to native species. May include shade trees.
  - Plantings, Irrigation. Probably little signage.
  - Does not include any structures such as water features, benches, etc.
  - 2024 Cost: TBD pending concept design and defining multi-year phases. Not to exceed Sacred Grounds Reserve.
  - Leadership: Rod B, Jack F, Jerry L'H

**Not Proposed for 2024 (for reference, not presented in the Board Meeting)**

- Green Wall
  - Shade the back (southwest) wall of the sanctuary for better comfort and lower cost A/C. The wall reaches upper 90's on the inside during the summer.
  - This generated some interest and discussion at the Congregational review meeting
  - Sacred Grounds does not propose to fund this, so with deficit projects in the operating budget this is unfunded
  - There are no volunteers to lead this
- Meditation garden
  - Requires more concept development. Possibly move Rev Barbara's bench to a quieter location?
- Retention Pond area
  - Requires concept development
  - could be a Desert Dry Wash Habitat
  - could be an amphitheater
  - awaits creative ideas