
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert

Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes

September 16, 2025

Attending:

A meeting of the UUCOD Board of Directors was held on Tuesday, September 16, 2025.

Board Members attending in person: Julia Alberg-Burbank, 1st Vice President, Julia Bell, Treasurer, Claudia Simmons, Secretary, John Ressler, Director at Large, Rev. Ian Riddell, Minister

Board Member Attending by Zoom: Rod Belshee, President

Board Members Not Present: Frank Riela, 2nd Vice President, Walter Gendell, Director at Large

Others Present:

Others Present by Zoom: Carolyn Etheridge

Welcome and Call to Order

Rod Belshee called the regular Board Meeting to order at 5:00 PDT.

Chalice Lighting.

Rev. Riddell offered inspirational sentiments and lit the chalice.

Check-In

Rod Belshee welcomed everyone and asked the Board, attendees, and online friends to check in.

Process Moderation

Julia Alberg-Burbank was assigned as the process monitor. Rod Belshee reminded the group that he prefers active moderation of discussion time, so the Board can better stick to the agenda and keep things moving along.

Consent Agenda

- Approval of Minutes and Manual Updates
 - The July 15, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes and the September 6, 2025, Board Retreat Minutes were presented with no edits or corrections.
 - Julia Bell moved to approve the July Board Minutes, seconded by John Ressler.
 - With no objections, the minutes were approved by acclamation.
 - Edits to the Manual for the Board and Short-Term Goals updates were also approved.

Voices of the Congregation:

- There were no additions by our congregant in attendance.

Old and Unfinished Business:

- Designation of Attitude of Gratitude Note Recipients.
 - John Ressler will send out notes this month in Walter Gendell's absence.
 - Note to be sent to Fran Hoag for providing lunch at the Board's Retreat this month.
 - The Stewardship team requested that we send a card of thanks to Jill Donovan for her work in preparing the new "Things New Members Should Know" Pamphlet.

New Business:

- COVID-19 Notification and Safety Measures
 - A congregant reported a COVID case, and notification was sent to the community.
 - Concerns were raised about balancing timely communication with privacy; the Board agreed that names may be shared only with the individual's consent, otherwise notices remain anonymous.
 - Suggestions for naturopathic treatments were discussed. The Board agreed such information could be posted on the UUCOD website (with a clear disclaimer that it is not official medical advice), and congregants could be directed there if interested.
 - The Board reaffirmed standard precautions: wearing masks, staying home if symptomatic, and a suggestion to keep vaccinations current.
 - It was noted that the building's HVAC and filtration systems meet public standards, with reminders to maintain optimal air circulation.
- October 18, 2025, Church Council.
 - Julia Alberg-Burbank sent a save-the-date email to all attendees. She is waiting to confirm times of local "No King's Day" marches before setting the time for the actual Council meeting. At this writing, it appears that 1:00-3:00 p.m. may be the best time.
 - The agenda will include committee reports, liaison roles, and a discussion of micro-volunteering.
 - Julia will send out pre-reads, including an article and video on micro-volunteerism.
- Board Learning.
 - Rev. Riddell selected *Serving with Grace* for the Board to use as a study resource to strengthen leadership skills, deepen understanding of the spirituality of service, and support lay leaders in their work.
 - The Board's assignment is to read the Introduction and the first chapter in preparation for the next meeting.
- Short-Term Goals Review.
 - *Institutional Thriving*: Support the transition to micro-volunteerism by gathering feedback and providing necessary resources.
 - *Shared Ministry*: Reestablish faith development programs, survey the congregation to identify needs, and recruit volunteers accordingly.
 - *Living Our Values*: Rebuild the structure for social justice engagement and reach out to congregants interested in participation.

- *Project Management*: Conduct regular progress checks and remove barriers, with an emphasis on supportive—rather than punitive—accountability.
- Review and Discussion of Monthly Reports.
 - All reports were made available ahead of time; highlights and questions were addressed during the meeting.
 - Treasurer: Julia Bell reviewed the financials. She said it had been suggested to add a new column to the financials comparing the current year-to-date with the previous year. This change has been made. She reported on minor accounting errors that have been corrected.
 - Director-at-Large Ressler reported that facilities maintenance and Sacred Grounds are thriving.
 - 1st VP Julia Alberg-Burbank reported that the Social Justice Committee is active in local events; there is collaboration with other groups for the upcoming Pride Parade.
 - AV/Zoom Setup: Rod Belshee reported the need for training and standardization of equipment setup for hybrid meetings. Rod also discussed that some of the existing AV equipment needs replacement.

Process Moderation:

- Julia Alberg-Burbank reported that the Board Meeting finished ahead of schedule, and everyone had been heard.

Extinguish the Chalice:

- Rev. Riddell extinguished the chalice with words of gratitude, acknowledging the responsibility, good humor, kindness, and spirit that everyone brings to their work.

Adjournment

- Rod Belshee adjourned the regular Board meeting at 6:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Claudia L. Simmons, Secretary

Date Approved: October 21, 2025.

Attachments
Monthly Reports

Report to the Board
September 16, 2025
President Rod Belshee

It has been a quiet two months. Huge gratitude to Rev Ian for planning his sabbatical so thoroughly. And welcome back! We did call him out of sabbatical for the deaths of two members.

We held a Board retreat on Sep 9. See the agenda and minutes on the google drive. The topics lead into the Church Council, which Julia is planning.

I attended UUA GA and met with UURISE to see what we might do as a congregation to Meet the Moment, in particular for those in the valley affected by the federal immigration policies and ICE raids. 32 congregants responded to the MeettheMoment@uucod.org email or attended one of the two preliminary sessions. Unfortunately this effort stalled when UURISE was unable to continue. Rev Ian and I are looking at alternate ways to restart this effort. Two other members have offered to help co-lead.

Given that we had a strong increase in Sunday worship attendance last winter I formed a group to look at options if we reach capacity. The attendance numbers right now are just about average for the past decade; we have managed larger crowds near the end of Rev Suzanne's and Rev Barbara's terms. The team is tasked with making recommendations to the Board so that if we reach capacity, perhaps this winter or next, we have a plan in place. In 2013 Kevin led a team to propose how to handle overflow crowds, but at that time there were fewer options than today, particularly given the new A/V options for streaming to the community room and streaming to homes.

The Desert Horticultural Society planning for Garden Day continues. UUCOD Sacred Grounds is prominent in their promotional materials, including their web page [Garden Day for California's Desert Residents](#) and their printed literature. Dave Emmerson will have a short session during their speaker's bureau. I have sent a detailed description of the event to all potentially affected groups at UUCOD. They will not be renting the kitchen or the community room, but will rent everything else including the labyrinth. The event is 9am-1pm on November 22.

The Breeze rollout achieved the goal of replacing Meminfo membership tracking and membership finances. As a bonus we got an online Directory that most members have joined. There are many other capabilities should we choose (and should leaders promote them). Membership is using Breeze to manage greeters and ushers. Social Justice is learning how to use Breeze to manage attendees at the Pride Parade. Breeze can help on scheduling, sending out notices, RSVPs, and reminders. A nice benefit if we use Breeze to manage volunteers and attendees more widely is that we can have visibility of who is active and who may have fallen off without us noticing.

We rolled out Skills and Interests in Breeze this summer, hoping to help leaders engage volunteers as this Fall. However only a handful of people have filled in the information. Similarly we had two people request that Breeze allow people to share a story about themselves, but the uptake has been very limited. We will leave these capabilities in place but not push their adoption. Perhaps some volunteer leaders will want to use the Skills and Interests tracking within their teams.

To: UUCOD Board

From: Julia Alberg-Burbank, 1st VP

September 16th, 2025

- I worked with Rod and Rev. Ian on the development of the agenda
- I issued a Save the Date for Church Council 10/18/25
- I am creating the agenda for Church Council
- I worked with Pam to make sure the Committee Chair Roster is up to date
- I was WA on August 3rd and August 17, as well as September 17th

Denominational Affairs:

Social Justice:

- Over 1200 backpacks were distributed in August. We had several volunteers representing UUCOD at Galilee Center
- TShirts for UUCOD will be on sale Friday Sept 19- Sunday September 28
- Jerry L'Hommedieu and Rob DuWors will be organizing the 2025 CVUSD Migrant Education Christmas Toy and Food Box Drive and Party
- Possible pro and con discussion of Prop 50

September 15, 2025

From: Frank Riela, 2nd Vice President

BOD Monthly Report

Report to the BOD:

My report to the BOD this month is simply that there is nothing significant to report, that won't be covered at an upcoming church council meeting. Neither Membership, nor Stewardship have any significant issue that requires BOD attention, that we don't already know about.

Thank you,
Frank Riela

Please see the blue highlighted areas on actual vs budget report. (account numbers)

July pledges are from all of Feb – June pledges paid for this FY. (4001)

\$223,201 has been committed and 31% has been collected. (4001)

STP for July collected \$538.63 for Galilee Center. (4360)

I mistakenly wrote the check for \$728.56. (5330.1)

\$458.11 was collected (4360) and paid to Planned Parenthood for August STP. (5330.1)

Parking lot bid is only \$13,983 instead of the \$25,000 budgeted. (5042)

We are having more cleaning and the costs increased monthly to \$575. (5045)

(5066) is for Sacred Grounds and not the \$1,800 in maintenance (5050) changed 9/9

Admin salary was increased by 3% and benefits also were adjusted. (5601 and 5602) as was Music Director's hours increased to 6/week. (5630)

Statement of Financial Position Report

Close of business 7/31/25 reports available.

(1200) MacLean Endowment Circle grew by 0.87% in month of July

Mistake by the fund-NEW total \$173,284.80 additional \$60.27

(1201) UUCOD Investment Fund grew by the same %

Mistake by the fund-NEW total \$267,787.51 additional \$93.14

(2312) Sabbatical Reserve Only \$2560 used for this year. \$7440 available for next year's sabbatical.

ALL OF THESE REPORTS ARE DRAFTS SINCE THE ACCOUNTANT HAS BEEN ON VACATION AND HAS NOT REVIEWED THESE.

Some of the A/V equipment is getting old and needing replacement. When we added streaming and the large screens we kept in place the existing audio amplifiers and speakers. They are now 21 years old. One amplifier failed a few months ago and another is now flakey. The A/V team is discussing replacing the remaining amplifiers, using funds in the A/V reserve account. (The A/V reserve has \$10,000 due to primarily to donated labor of Steve Kerr and me, as well as higher donations than forecast.)

I am the liaison to the Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Ministry (DIBM), the Personnel Advisory Committee and Leadership Development Committees. None of these have met yet this fiscal year.

Tracking against FY 2025-2026 Strategic Goals

1) **Micro-volunteerism.** Attempt to broaden a culture of engagement and volunteerism by piloting the concept of Micro-Volunteerism, shifting some committees to a role of organizing events with short-term task teams to do the work. Explore the idea at the Church Council and pilot the concept with a couple of willing committees during 2025-2026.

Planned for Church Council agenda.

2) **Infrastructure for micro-volunteerism.** In support of piloting Micro-Volunteerism, in 2025-2026 learn what infrastructure is needed to make the committees successful and make plans to provide such support to other committees as they transition in the future.

Awaiting pilot committees.

3) **LifeSpan.** Re-establish our Lifespan Spiritual Growth program to provide opportunity to learn and grow in individual and community spiritual depth and understanding, with at least two offerings. Consider promoting the offerings outside of the church.

The Lifespan team met last week.

4) **Social Change Now.** Conduct a Lifespan series using the workbook Social Change Now (the UUA common read).

Planning underway by Rev Ian.

5) **Meet the Moment.** Given the harm inflicted by the federal government on the immigrant community in our valley, and our call to live out our values in response, we will discern and establish a Meet the Moment program—developed in partnership with frontline organizations—to help reduce harm.

Stalled. Rod and Rev Ian discussing how to restart.

Board Member at Large Report September 2025

Hospitality

- All is going well with our Hospitality team and nothing of significance to report to the Board.

Attitude of Gratitude

- In my absence John Ressler has been filling in for me – and it is much appreciated.

Worship Associate

- I was worship associate on September 7th.

Submitted by:

Walter Gendell

Board Member at Large

September 9, 2025

Monthly Report – September 16, 2025
UUCOD Secretary Claudia Simmons

I was present and took Board Minutes at the July 2025 meeting, and they are awaiting approval from the Board at the September 2025 Board Meeting.

I took minutes at the Board Retreat on September 6, 2025. They have been sent to the Board members and posted on the Google shared drive.

Minister's Report to the UUCOD Board

September 16, 2025

The Rev. Ian W. Riddell

Gratitude!

What a gift my two-month sabbatical was. Extended time for reflection, reading, and discernment. Extended time with my family and friends. I spent time exploring more deeply the writings of fellow religious naturalists, reading and re-reading the novels and essays of Ursula Le Guin, reflecting on and meditating with the Tao Te Ching. And I'm almost finished my sabbatical knitting project, a beautiful blanket for our home.

I am deeply grateful to the congregation for this time and space. I know that I return to you more rested, more focused, and more grounded than when I left. And I'm already starting to ponder what next years two months will hold.

I will be working with the Committee on Ministry and Worship teams to assess our sabbatical time and begin to make plans for next July and August as the year goes along. I can report that Rev. Everett Howe had a wonderful experience with us and is very grateful for the care and kindness and welcome you showed him over the summer.

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

- 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. I am especially grateful for how you cared for each other during my sabbatical.
- Joni Paddock has taken on the leadership of the Care Team and is calling the group together for our first meeting soon. Thank you, Joni!
- There were some issues with contacting the family of one of the congregants who died while I was on sabbatical. This highlights for me the need to renew our drive for updated Emergency Contact Sheets from as many congregants as possible.
- We will hold Celebrations of Life for both Marian Ellson and Derek Moore—who died while I was on sabbatical—later in the fall when more community members are present.

B. Administration, Governance, and Staff

- Things seemed to go very smoothly for staff and administration while I was on sabbatical. I have met with the board president and vice president and both of our staff members since my return and all report smooth sailing in my absence.

Membership and Committees

- I will begin again to meet regularly with several committees. I participate monthly with Worship, DIBM, Stewardship, CoM, the Board, and Chalice Circles. I participate in alternate months with Membership and Social Justice.
- I look forward to participating in the new format of our Men's Breakfasts this fall. I have attended the monthly crafting gathering since my return and will be participating in Marty's health class this coming week.

C. Lifespan Faith-Development

- I met with Fran Hoag this past week and we began plans for several lifespan learning options this fall and winter (the UUA's Common Read Social Change Now and a class like Building Your Own Theology, but updated) We are also planning to survey the congregation for their wants and needs in this area and soliciting volunteers to help guide this work with us.

D. Worship

- I continue to plan with two couples who will marry in the area in the next two months and another couple whose wedding I will be performing in Las Vegas in February of 2026.
- Except for one Sunday, we have service leaders planned through December 12.
- We have worship associates and piano players planned through December
- A member of the AV team will now co-lead the weekly Production meetings with me. Our preparation for my sabbatical means that our AV and Worship teams will now be owning the whole process of preparation on weeks when I'm not in the pulpit.
- I led or participated in worship twice since my return.
 - September 7 — "How Civilizations Heal: The Role of the Artist in the Face of the World" with Steven Toporoff. This was the second of my auction sermons.
 - September 14 — "Ask Your Minister Anything: A Question Box Service" Julia Alberg-Burbank.
- Our Ingathering service will be on October 12. We will celebrate a Blessing of the Animals again on October 19.
- I am working with Rabbit King to plan a joint UUCOD/DOS Pride service in the afternoon of Pride Sunday. More info soon!

F. Denominational Activities

- I regularly consult with local and regional colleagues on issues affecting our congregations.
- I have been meeting monthly as a mentor to a new minister as he works through his Preliminary Fellowship.

G. Prophetic Outreach, Interfaith Activities, and Local Collaboration

- I continue to reach out to local leaders to find ways our congregation can get more involved in the justice work in our area.
- I will begin working with congregational leaders and volunteers as we continue to discern how we will meet the moment of our current political and social reality.

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 participated in a week-long, UU-led silent retreat during the final week of my sabbatical. It was a wonder experience of rest and contemplation.

My weekly schedule is as follows:

My day off is Monday. My writing/reading day, which I try to keep free of meetings, will be Fridays and I will work in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Upcoming Travel Schedule:

- I will be away on vacation from Saturday, November 15, to Saturday, November 22. I have no other vacation time planned before Christmas.

in peace and deep love

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dee', is written on a light-colored background.