

FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL
SOCIETY IN BROOKLYN

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIETY
FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026

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CLERGY

“A Year of Revelation”

First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn

Interim Minister Rev. Micah C. Ma

What a year it has been! It has been a year of tremendous change, with the departure of first Rev. Meagan Henry and then Director of Congregational Life Garnett Losak. The congregation bore these changes with—of course—some sorrow and trepidation, and also tremendous grace. Both well beloved leaders were showered with gifts and gratitude as they went on their way, and the congregation has really shown up to fill in the gaps they left behind. We also welcomed some new members to the team, who are not just filling some very large shoes, but also making their roles their own.

Staffing

We welcomed John McKeown (building engineer), Sean Sellers (youth coordinator), and Tyrone Davis, Jr. (membership coordinator) to the staff, and contracted Cassandra Narcisse as our new finance specialist. Sean has been doing an excellent job as youth coordinator, making sure the youth feel well supported while also giving them room to lead themselves. Tyrone has jumped in with both feet as the new membership coordinator, which is different from Garnett’s previous role as the Director of Congregational Life. His focus is more on membership and less on programming (realistic, given this is a half-time role), and he shares leadership with the Connections Committee.

Wendy Russell has been promoted to Congregational Administrator. Bookkeeping/payroll duties have been removed from her plate and given to Cassandra, who comes into the office twice a week now to print checks, attend Finance Committee meetings, and other bookkeeping-related tasks.

Renee Strickland is now officially our Director of Facilities, supported by our new building engineer John McKeown, who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role. He seems able to do any number of repairs on his own, from plumbing to roofing! Assisted by sexton Bobby Blackman whenever Bobby is available.

Becky Huffman had a very temporary staff position this year as Religious Education Coordinator, holding space until we can hire a new Director of Religious Education. At the time of this writing I’m not able to say the outcome of the DRE search...but I imagine that announcement will be very soon! (And I’m sure Becky will be enormously relieved to hand over the reins.)

Finances & Stewardship

This year also saw a revelation concerning congregational finances: the facade restoration has cost twice as much money as projected, eating into the endowment. This has an effect on the congregation’s annual budget, as it is significantly padded by a “sustainable draw” on the endowment. When this “sustainable draw” was recalculated, it amounted to ~\$70K, about half of what the previous years’ draws have been.

This has meant a lot of belt-tightening across the board while maintaining commitments to bringing staff salaries up to UUA guidelines. The Finance Committee has worked hard to tighten the budget as much as

possible, and a new, expanded Stewardship Team showed up to run a lively out-of-the-box Stewardship campaign. The Stewardship Team “shot for the moon” and set a goal of \$360,000, with the idea of being more reliant on ourselves and our pledges and less reliant on the endowment. At the time of this writing, we’re at a little over \$290,000 and there are still ~40 pledges outstanding. Will they bring us to our goal? Fingers crossed!

The “Kindling Gatherings” that the Stewardship Team piloted this year seem to have been a huge success. While they appeared similar to previous “cottage parties” in the past, the Kindling Gatherings were slightly more structured, featuring a ritual aspect in the beginning where all participants lit a candle in order to enter the space (to remind everyone that many sparks create a flame). Then, after some mingling, everyone was invited to share a warm memory of First U. These stories were often very moving, and sometimes tears were even shed. People came away from these gatherings feeling closer to each other and grateful for the community. Kudos to Spencer Brill for chairing the Stewardship Team this year!

Programming

I was a little worried, at the beginning of this program year, about a programming vacuum. Garnett and Rev. Meagan were both responsible for a lot of the programming at First U, whether it was formation of new affinity/interest groups, teaching classes, leading Vespers, or more. I needn’t have worried, because it’s still impossible to get anything on the calendar on a Sunday afternoon! Various affinity groups are going strong, and added to the roster this year were the Poetry of Devotion and Doubt group and the Religious Naturalism group.

I did pre-emptively pilot a small group ministry based on the Soul Matters curriculum this year, led by a handful of hand-picked (by me) facilitators. It seems to have gone well, and my hope is that it will launch for the full program year in the fall. The Kindling Gatherings seem to demonstrate a real need for closer community and small group ministry, and I think Soul Matters is one program that can fill that need.

Religious Education

The RE volunteers did an AMAZING job holding it together this year, not only holding regular classes but also elementary school OWL and the Coming of Age program. Hats off to Becky Huffman for stepping in as temporary RE coordinator!

The rest of this report will now be dedicated to my assessment as to how First U is doing on the five tasks of interim ministry:

History - Owning our history

As I noted the first year, First U has a fairly good grasp of its own history. A now-deceased member, Olive Hoogenboom, wrote a book of the history of the congregation, which has since been updated and supplemented by deacon Nancy Wolf. Congregants are aware that this is a congregation with a long history and a very old building. The congregation observes many worship traditions that are not just UU (e.g. Water Communion and Flower Communion) but also ones that are unique to this congregation (e.g. Good Friday and Davol Bible Sunday). Then there are community traditions such as UniFair (always held the first Saturday of December!), Juneteenth, and various potlucks and luncheons at the beginning and end of the program year and during the holidays.

What does it mean for some traditions to evolve? When the Juneteenth service began, sometime at the turn of the century, Juneteenth was a little-known holiday and the service had an important educational role. Now, in a post-Black Lives Matter world, Juneteenth is a national holiday. How will the congregation observe Juneteenth now? Similarly, the Davol Bible fund, begun in the memory of Alice Davol over a hundred years ago, is long gone. Yet we continue to give our seven-year-olds a Bible, even though most Unitarian Universalists would not consider themselves Christian. How will we continue to honor Alice Davol and her fondness for children?

Identity - Knowing Who We Are

During one of his stewardship announcements, Spencer Brill shared that First U apparently has a reputation as “the joyful church.” How striking! I wonder who said that, and where they heard it from? This certainly does bear with my own observations. The worship services here are uplifting and inspiring, due in no small part to the music program. Children dance in the aisles at the beginning of the service, and the people are warm and gregarious. People love to shout “welcome!” at newcomers during the announcements. This is clearly a place where people come to feel good, and maybe escape the worries of the world a little bit. A common anxiety expressed at the beginning of the program year, when there was so much transition going on, was that it felt like this source of comfort was falling apart.

This oasis of joy and comfort in the turbulent seas of New York City is so important that people hate to “rock the boat.” People prefer to keep quiet rather than engage in open conflict, and there’s a certain amount of nervousness around getting “too political” (e.g. engaging in anything that might be deemed controversial) in case that alienates people or draws fire from the current presidential administration.

The result is a congregation that is, in a few ways, a little conservative. We value our traditions (not in the form of the “traditional family,” but the traditions of this institution—not to mention our highly traditional building!) and we don’t like to take too many risks with our finances or our building or our justice-making work. In other ways this congregation is quite radical: we’re delightfully committed to welcome and community building in a way that feels very countercultural in New York City. Heck, the commitment to tradition may be countercultural too!

I encourage the congregation to believe in yourselves, and in your relationships. This congregation has survived conflict before—many, many conflicts! And a relationship that cannot survive conflict is not a true or deep relationship. For the congregation to really lean into its mission around *community* (and that is the thing I hear lifted up, over and over again, as being the role that First U plays in people’s lives: community), that means embracing the hard stuff. That means having hard conversations, disagreeing with each other, and beginning again and again in love.

In these days of the “loneliness epidemic,” community is needed more than ever.

Leadership - Allowing New Leadership to Emerge

Boy, this one has seen a lot of change over the past year! The departure of key longtime staff members Rev. Meagan Henry and Garnett Losak left a big void. The Religious Education Council rose to the challenge, led by Becky Huffman, to hold the RE program together until we could search for and hire a new DRE. We hired Tyrone Davis as a new part-time membership coordinator to fulfill a few of Garnett’s duties...but not all of them, since he is, after all, only part time.

New leadership has emerged, and is emerging. The Board has really stepped up to put into place some infrastructure that will be helpful with institutional memory going forward, so that we don't have to rely on longtime staff or members to tell us what we're supposed to be doing next. The Board is also now organizing the congregational meetings—with an eye toward accessibility, especially for the people who attend online. The Connections Committee and the Leadership Development Committee are expanding their work around membership engagement and leadership development. Little by little, we're progressing toward a congregation that's a little more self-sufficient and less dependent on paid staff. And there is surely more to come, as people continue to visit, join, and figure out how to get involved. The work of the next year will be to make it more clear and transparent exactly how people can get involved and what they can do!

Connection - connecting with other communities and the wider Unitarian Universalist world

Despite there being multiple UU congregations in NYC, there is not regular widespread collaboration. This is not because of any animosity! Each congregation is tremendously busy with its own affairs (and somehow two of the three Manhattan congregations are also in ministerial transition, while the third doesn't have its own building), transportation is an obstacle, and there's also just a cultural preference for staying in your own neighborhood/borough. That said, there have been several attempts this year to meet up with the other NY UU congregations for protests, and we are planning to march together for NYC Pride. Small steps. Maybe next year we can all do the same Share the Plate for the same month?

First U's RE program keeps up with changes at the UUA and takes advantage of many of its offerings. We integrated the new "JETPIG" values into RE curriculum this year and introduced them to the congregation, and every year we offer some form of Our Whole Lives, which is a national program shared between the UUA and the UCC. Every few years we run Coming of Age, which is also a national program.

The congregation as a whole connects with Unitarian Universalism mainly through worship, such as Water and Flower Communion and using UU hymnbooks. Behind the scenes, we use UUA compensation resources. Could we be taking advantage of more? We could look at [the Mosaic](#) resources to move toward becoming an antiracist congregation, participate in the [Welcoming Congregation Renewal program](#), and/or use [LeaderLab](#) to develop more leaders within our congregation. I'm not saying that we *must* do these things. There's very little that we *must* do. These are just some of the resources that are available to us, if we want them.

And slowly, slowly, we're branching out and building connections in the wider Brooklyn community as well. The Service Collective reached out to us about hosting the community fridge that needs to move from First Presbyterian. (Ultimately we declined to participate, but it's nice that they thought of us!) We hosted a benefit concert for the New Sanctuary Coalition. And we're hosting the Brooklyn Pride Interfaith Service this year!

My hope is to build more connections that aren't clergy driven. It makes sense that outside organizations tend to reach out to the minister, because the minister is the public "face" of the congregation. But if those relationships live with the minister, they die when the minister leaves. And I'm leaving very soon! How do we build more organic connections where the relationship is with the congregation, and not just with one or two individuals?

Vision

Last year, I wondered if this congregation wanted anything other than “for things to continue as they have been.” Well, now things CANNOT continue as they have been. And now it seems that the congregation wants all sorts of things! The congregation wants to be more financially reliant on itself and less on rentals and the endowment; be of service to the local community; and most of all, to remain a source of community and comfort to the people who need it.

More may yet arise. But this is a good place to be.

The Challenges Ahead

Financial issues have been discussed elsewhere, so I won't go into it too much here except to say that this is not a crisis. The endowment isn't gone, just smaller than we'd like, and if we're prudent and savvy it will grow back. And what is an endowment for, if not to spend on needful things? It does no one any good to hoard it.

In the more immediate future, the challenge is in figuring out our capacity. In the past where there was a larger full time staff that could take on more work, a lot of things could be delegated to staff. Now that staff capacity has shrunk, we need to rely more on volunteers. This wonderfully multigenerational congregation has limited capacity for volunteerism. To put it plainly: people work! Their spare time is precious! And there's been a generational shift in how and when people volunteer, too. People today are reluctant to make indefinite commitments to committees, preferring instead to work on time-limited projects with tangible results. So what can we reasonably expect of ourselves now? We will frustrate ourselves if we expect too much.

Then there are the cultural challenges. Like the financial challenges, these will take longer to work out. There have long been issues of boundaries around staff. It seems like it's never clear what staff are supposed to do and what they aren't, and role creep happens easily. People share a little too freely about each other (gossip). People jump to conclusions rather than speaking directly and then listening. This in turn leads quickly and easily to people forming factions, forgetting that we're all part of the same community. Our enemies are not in here, and the more time we spend avoiding each other or bickering with each other, the more our actual adversaries can grab power. Indeed, we've already seen it happening.

I'm not going to absent myself from these challenges; it's easy for me to be affected by the prevailing culture. I too want to take on everything and share too freely of what I know. But I'm going to keep an eye out for it and do better, and I hope that everyone will help keep me—and all of us—accountable for being better.

In Conclusion

This is largely a healthy congregation. Are there some issues? Sure, but who doesn't? The people here are good-hearted, smart, competent, and generous. There's very little pretentiousness and a lot of sincerity. I think in that way this congregation mirrors Brooklyn! And this is all really reflected in how this congregation raises children with a strong sense of values, and who understand the importance of community. That alone cannot be underestimated.

STAFF REPORTS

Tyrone Davis, Jr., Membership Coordinator

This is my first annual report as Membership Coordinator, beginning the staff position on December 29th, 2025. Though the membership coordinator position is a scaled-down, part-time version of its previous iteration, Director of Congregational Life, I'm honored to continue the work of its longtime position holder, Garnett Losak. I am deeply grateful for her ongoing guidance as I learn the duties of this position.

Given my taking over of the role only four months prior to the writing of the report, I will not be able to provide a comprehensive report of the entire year, but I will do my best to document the state of membership currently and over the past four months.

Membership

Upon starting the position, one of my first duties was learning how to use ServantKeeper, our church membership database. Every week, I enter Sunday's visitors and newcomers into our database, from which I use their email addresses to send them a friendly email introducing them to the many ways they can stay involved with worship and congregational life at First U. In remaining with tradition, I lead a newcomer's orientation the first Sunday of every month, providing a primer on the history and theology Unitarian-Universalism and on the history of our building and congregation. By the time of this report's publication, I will have led five orientations. Each one has been well attended by newcomers seeking more information about our faith and traditions.

It is also in ServantKeeper where I can keep track of current active members. **At the time of this report's writing, our membership total is 251.** That total includes nineteen new members who joined on November 16th, 2025, and two new members who joined and signed our Membership Book on March 15th, 2026. Six additional congregants are primed to sign our Membership Book on May 17th, 2026, bringing the **total number of new members in 2025-2026 to 25.**

Sundays

Sundays have been quite lively in my time here, averaging 195 in-person attendants at Sunday services and 19 on Zoom. Many thanks to our Livestream Team and our intern minister, Yvonne Garrett, who facilitates the online services and provides a warm presence and pastoral care to those who need it. My Sunday duties consist of setting up the Welcome Table for Coffee Hour, greeting congregants, welcoming newcomers, collecting and answering any questions congregants may have, and delivering pulpit announcements. Members and newcomers alike continue to be drawn to Rev. Micah's ministry and to the music leadership of Adam Podd, and of course, First U's dedicated and talented choir.

Post-service Coffee Hours have been wonderful, intergenerational fellowships, bustling with energy, laughter, and, of course, coffee! I extend much gratitude to our sexton, Bobby Blackman, who prepares and breaks down the undercroft for us every Sunday.

Connections Committee

Speaking of coffee hour, the Connections Committee continues to be a warm presence at First U, dedicated to making newcomers feel welcomed into our community. They buzz around at coffee hour, connecting newcomers with friendly members and finding me when an excited want-to-be member reveals themselves. Additionally, they remain consistent in their Sunday Welcome Table duties, welcoming newcomers and answering any questions they might have.

The Connections Team consists of *Luke Louis Messina, Colleen Olson, Lexi Perlmutter, Allen Kone, Brian Elig, Charles Lynch, Lee Pardee, Maxine Schulof, Caroline Ghigliotty, and Linda Donaldson-Guidi.*

In our monthly meetings, we have continued to brainstorm ways to keep current members engaged and newcomers coming. Ideas, such as neighborhood-specific events (led by congregants), continue to be pondered and ironed out. Their latest achievement was revamping and approving a new mission statement that more accurately reflects the Committee's goals, duties, and philosophy.

In my time with the Committee, I am thrilled about the revival and newest iteration of **First U's BIPOC Spiritual Affinity Group**. At the time of this publication, the group will have met twice, meeting on the last Wednesday of every month—meeting for the first time in March of 2026. The group's format allows for poignant and joyful discussions and worship that intersect with race, spirituality, Unitarian Universalism, and lived and shared experiences. Worship/discussion leaders for each meeting rotate among attendees. The average number of attendants has totaled 6.

I am in the process of planning my first New Member's Breakfast/Ceremony and Pathways course this spring. The committee has already proven to be extremely supportive in helping these two events come together, providing ideas and volunteering their time to provide manual labor, such as setting up and even baking homemade treats!

I am looking forward to developing my work and relationship with the Connections Committee.

Stewardship Team

As planning for the stewardship campaign for 2026-2027 began just as I joined the staff, I have worked closely with the Stewardship Team, providing membership information and data as needed, as well as collecting and inputting member pledges into ServantKeeper. Further, I am in connection with the committee whenever a soon-to-be member needs canvassing to make their pledge towards official membership. The team consists of *Spencer Brill, Vicki Antonini, Lee Pardee, Sarah Karstaedt, Tracie Morris, Rick Smigielski, Peggy Schubert, and Erin Hopkins.*

Though figuring out the scope of this new position at First U has been a day-by-day process, I'd be remiss if I didn't name the wonderful support I've received from staff members, Rev. Micah and Wendy Russell, and from entire First U community at large. I look forward to growing into the role and further into the loving community at First U.

Warmly,

Tyrone Davis, Jr.

Membership Coordinator

Adam Podd, Music Director

TLDR

As far as First U's music program goes, this was a year that looked, on paper, a lot like last year. And in many ways, it was. The main characters have more or less been the same: weekly morning services with an awesome choir, brilliant soloists, big programs for Christmas Eve and Palm Sunday, continued monthly Jazz Sundays, and other special services throughout the year. Though all familiar, the experience of it didn't feel static. Something deepened.

Stability and comfort in a year of change

This year included some significant staff transitions, including the departures of Rev. Meagan Henry and Garnett Losak early in the program year. In that context, I've been especially aware of the role music plays here. I hear regularly from folks that the music here at First U is a steadying force amid uncertainty, both within our walls and beyond them.

The choir

The choir remains the center of gravity for music in worship. And as such, it continues to feel like its own kind of small group ministry within the larger community of First U. Our weekly rehearsal (9am on Sundays) is more than just preparation for the service — it's a weekly touchpoint, and spiritual practice. Choir practice is a space for people to arrive as they are, and leave a little more connected to themselves, to each other, and even to something larger. If you haven't already, you've got to try it some time! There's a real sense of care, investment, and joy that is hard to quantify, but easy to feel if you're in the room.

Volunteers, engagement, and music in community

Something that continues to stand out is how much musical talent exists within this congregation. Even more musicians from our community have found their way into services — not only in the choir, but also as soloists and instrumentalists.

This adds something beyond the musical excellence we've long enjoyed at First U. It brings a realness and texture that feels genuinely special — and increasingly rare. It's variety, yes, but more than that: it's the relational part of church life, on display in a unique and artistic way.

Here in NYC, you can hear incredible musicians any night of the week. But on Sunday mornings, we get something more — a neighbor, a member of your support group, your kid's Coming-of-Age mentor, someone you serve on a committee with... sometimes all of the above, making music together and inviting you in. I often tell people: It's an experience you can't just buy into or pay to consume. You get to receive it, and participate in it, only by showing up.

Another "goodbye"

We are sad to report that after 10 fantastic years of reporting for singing duty on Sunday mornings, we will be losing our section leader Candice Helfand-Rogers. We've been lucky to have an unwavering professional quartet with the same four people for far longer than most churches typically enjoy, but

alas the streak has come to an end. Candice will be stepping down to redirect energy to her writing career and family. We wish her the best and will miss her unique gifts and offerings to this community.

The whole world is watching

First Unitarian continues to have a meaningful presence in the wider UU landscape. Our streamed services and video work reach thousands of viewers on YouTube, and we regularly hear from UU communities looking to us as a model for thoughtful, high-quality worship. That visibility is a real credit to this worship team.

On a related note, I (Adam), along with Sophia Miller, was invited by Jen Hayman, the President of AUUMM (Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries) to help develop a new “Worship and Music” curriculum for their Certified Music Leader program. The course launches this summer, and we’ll be teaching it together at the national conference.

I also continue to stay actively connected across the denomination — leading workshops, consulting with other UU churches, and maintaining relationships with colleagues doing similar work around the country. Oh, and I have an original song you probably know “Joy in the morning” in the UUA’s new hymnal. I hear from other churches often about how they’re enjoying singing this song that was born right here at First U Brooklyn.

Two money things:

1. Choir Ri\$ers

Over the summer, we unexpectedly lost access to the choir risers we had been using for years and needed to purchase a new set after the budget had already been finalized. The Board approved the purchase (\$11,022.42) in good faith that we would figure it out and “find the money.” The response from the choir and a handful music-loving congregants was immediate and generous, yielding \$9,374.00, and covering most of the cost. This leaves a balance of \$1,648.42

We’ll be holding a fundraising recital with Kiena and Brandon on June 2nd to help close the remaining gap (just beyond the timing of this report).

2. Julie McKinney Special Music Fund

The Julie McKinney Fund supports Jazz Sundays, Palm Sunday, Christmas Eve, and other special musical elements of our services. I’ve been watching it more closely after a notable drop in contributions two years ago. Fiscal Year 23–24 closed about 30% below prior years; 24–25 improved, at 10% below those same benchmarks. I focused the messaging around the appeal to this fund the past two years around broadening the donor base for stability and hopefully help smooth out these bigger swings year to year. Good news, this year appears on track to be fairly close to where we were before the big drop, and indeed with more people giving small and medium-level donations (often recurring monthly).

Great job everybody! We’re not out of the woods entirely, but things are looking better.

Okay, wrap it up Adam

If I had to sum it up: this was a year of continuation, but not stagnation.

A lot of the work looks like “maintenance” from the outside. But this maintenance is an active practice, This incredible music team is **actively** maintaining quality, culture, and a sense of connection week after week. That kind of work is less visible than launching new initiatives, but no less satisfying or special to be part of, trust me :)

With love,

Adam Podd

Director of Music

Renee Strickland, Director of Facilities

Annual Report (2025 - 2026) for Facilities: Building Operations & Events

Renee Strickland, Director of Facilities

Daniel Walters, Chair of Facilities Committee

This year we welcomed our new Building Engineer, John McKeown, in September 2025; Bobby Blackman was promoted to Sexton; and Renee Strickland donned the job title of Director of Facilities. Congregant Daniel Walters served as Chair of the Facilities Committee until April 2026, and we are now actively looking for a new Chair - perhaps you?

The first topic on anyone's mind is the **Facade Restoration**. We experienced a significant setback in Fall 2025 when we had to find a new fiberglass fabricator for the complex spire elements. Congregant Tom Check led this effort, with assistance from Renee Strickland. We are now on track to finish the primary phase - restoring the windows (thanks to Matt Castle), rebuilding the spires (thanks to Tom Check), and installing the new lightning rods (led by Daniel Walters) - and taking down the scaffolding by the end of 2026. The final work is to repoint the mortar joints below the roofline, currently covered by the scaffolding; that will happen in the spring/summer 2027.

Meanwhile, we accomplished significant improvements inside the building:

- The new **fire detection and suppression system** was installed and upgraded to current code throughout our building compound - a project that started 8 years ago and stalled until this past year.
- The failing central air conditioning system was upgraded to more energy efficient **mini splits** in the classrooms used by our primary tenant Imagine Daycare and our Religious Education classes.
- The **main sewer line** catastrophically failed because of age, tree roots, and this past winter's sustained freezes. John rebuilt the 3-stall bathroom subflooring, installed a new toilet, and oversaw the installation of a new sewer line to the street connector.
- The boiler installed last year had to work overtime to keep up with this winter's brutally cold temps, and our ancient **steam pipes** could not keep up with this demand. John spent many weeks replacing 120 feet of failed cast iron pipe under the Frances White Room floors, as well as 100 feet overhead in the boiler room.
- Speaking of the effects of this past winter, the blizzard revealed multiple roof leaks from the office **patio deck** down to the classroom ceilings. John and Bobby are carefully re-leveling the grade of the almost 30 year old patio deck and rebuilding it to ensure the patio can withstand both rain and snow for years to come.
- The Year End Appeal raised funds for Liam Mitchell's elegant and affordable temporary **sound abatement** solution for the Undercroft. The fabric covered rockwood panels reduce acoustic hum within the space, and more panels can be added to amplify this effect. Liam, Anne Calder, Daniel Walters, and Tom Check constructed and hung the panels.

Next up is the **Kitchen Upgrade**. We officially decommissioned our unnecessary commercial rating, saving us over \$6,000 a year in required inspections on the old gas range that has warmed its last pot of

soup. The Facilities Committee and staff are exploring new appliance options for the space, including whether it is time to upgrade to a more environmentally sound induction range.

Additionally, with the scaffolding coming down this year, the **Gardening Committee** has started planting the seeds (metaphorically) to rehabilitate our gardens.

Serving the Wider Community

First Unitarian Brooklyn opens its doors seven days a week. On any given day, you will find artists, activists, celebrants, and civic organizations in our space, often running parallel events. These partnerships not only enhance our congregation's reputation as a center for community gathering, but they also provide 70% of our annual operating revenue.

Arts Organizations this past year include Ages of Reflection, Ambient Church, Books Are Magic, Brooklyn Chamber Music Society, Brooklyn Choir Project, cafe con libros, ISSUE Project Room, Keys to Success, (le) Poisson Rouge, McNally Jackson, Noel Pointer Foundation, Pioneer Works, Repast Baroque Ensemble, Voices in the Heights, Wednesday Music Club, and World Music Institute.

Education & Children's Groups include Imagine Early Learning Center, Child's Play NY (who just signed a 5 year lease extension), Pratt Institute, NYU Film, and Saint Ann's School.

Community Organizations include twelve-step recovery groups, labor union organizers, progressive policy organizations, co-op board meetings, mediation groups, and religious gatherings.

Ceremonies. Weddings, baby blessings, and memorials serve as a special category of events, marking important moments in the lives of both congregants and community members. Jay Lawrence and Lukas Bauer have continued to serve a key role, recording and live streaming the ceremonies and supporting the audio-visual needs of live musicians and speakers.

GOVERNANCE REPORTS

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

TAKING STOCK

The 2025-26 church year was another year of great change. As we continue to respond to the loss of long-time senior leadership, we also begin to shift forward into our next chapter.

STAFFING

The greatest change was the departure of two beloved staff members: Garnett Losak and Meagan Henry. Garnett, our 20-year director of congregational life, retired at the end of 2026. She was a rock for us; the de facto person at the 'center of everything.' Garnett made sure that new visitors received name tags and connected them to committees that might appeal. She organized Thanksgiving dinners and Passover Seders. She started new affinity groups to give members new ways to connect, ensured we were fed at congregational events, and taught us about the history of both First U and Unitarianism as a whole. In her departure, we have come to appreciate her hard work and contributions even more — and have begun finding new ways to fill the void.

Similarly, our Associate Minister, Meagan, left us in late 2025 for another career opportunity. After 12 years with the congregation, she was deeply connected to our children, both present and grown. As DRE, Meagan really strengthened our RE program. She fostered leadership among the youth in the Coming of Age and Youth Groups, as well as broadened their horizons by establishing an annual service trip to West Virginia. It is now a cornerstone of the Youth Group program, to which the kids look forward every year.

To fill the voids created in Garnett and Meagan's absence, we have looked to new faces – and new roles for faces already familiar to us. Tyrone Davis Jr. took on part of Garnett's work; he now serves as our Membership Coordinator, working 20 hours each week to keep us connected and organized. He's brought tremendous heart, enthusiasm and his own style to the work, and we're so grateful to have him.

Becky Huffman and Sean Sellers stepped up to keep RE rolling along. Becky brought rigorous organization and compassionate leadership, while Sean contributed new ideas and warmth. Together, they've done a magnificent job.

We've also weathered change on our facilities team. Longtime Director of Facilities Chris Johnson retired, and we were incredibly fortunate to hire John McKeown to take over much of Chris' role. John has proven extremely capable, hardworking, and knowledgeable. His know-how and willingness to jump into daunting projects has saved us both money and time. We promoted our beloved Bobby Blackman to a greater role as full-time sexton; we're thrilled to have him back on Sundays when many of us get to see his smiling face. Finally, Renee Strickland, who manages both our physical campus as well as its abundant rentals, has taken on the greater title of Director of Facilities. She continues to do a remarkable job keeping our nearly 200-year-old building up and running, as well as bursting with activity at all hours of the day and night.

MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP

We made important strides this year in our pursuit of a new minister. After much research into the possibility of adopting a co-ministerial model, we voted to continue using the senior minister model that has served us well for a very long time. This decision was based on financial constraints, as well as our congregational needs. Having made this decision, we have embarked upon the search process for a single Senior Minister.

We agreed to retain Rev. Micah for a third year to provide continuity during the search. We formed the Special Nominating Committee, which has worked hard to form a balanced and diverse Search Committee.

Our Ministerial Intern, Yvonne Garrett, continued to lead, expand, and improve our online worship offering. We have agreed to ordain her and are planning to celebrate her in June, as she ends her internship with us.

PHYSICAL PLANT

Our sanctuary is a spiritual place, but also a physical one. We appreciate the riches that have been handed down to us in this way — our glorious stained glass windows, soaring organ, creaky balconies, and charming goats-milk faux brick. This year, we're expressing our gratitude for what we've been given by spending a lot of money to maintain and restore our spires, facade, and windows.

We continued to invest in the restoration of our gorgeous, historic facade. In doing so, we have realized that our funds are not unlimited. As a result, we have shown some commitment of our energies as volunteers to get things done ourselves, or to do without.

As we've withdrawn the funds to do this important work, the congregation has become both aware and mindful of the cushion, comfort and convenience that our endowment has offered us over the years. As a group, we want to maintain this level of protection and have shown increased concern for our spending.

All of these changes largely shaped our church year, but the other driving force was our collective response to change. We were forced to adapt and to look ahead, and we saw new people first filling the gaps and then bringing new ideas and energy.

We've come to see the virtue of volunteerism and our collective powers as a group. We're slowly changing our thinking to consider more DIY solutions, whether it's potluck lunches over catering, or painting the chapel ourselves. These collaborative efforts save us money, but they also strengthen our connections to one another by working together and offer a satisfying exercise of our commitment to this community.

GOVERNANCE

The 2025-2026 Trustees of the Board have led the Congregation through its second year of transition between settled ministers. The trustees include Vicki Antonini, Michele Ascione (who had to step down part way through the year, to be replaced by Marci Mehta), Barbara Bornmann, Anne Calder, Jake Powell, Mark Weiss, Luke Messina, Amanda Nietzel, and Julie Elting (who stepped down in the winter, replaced by Michael Dore).

Co-presidents Anne Calder and Mark Weiss formed the standing committee with Amanda Nietzel. Under their leadership, the Board conducted their monthly meetings, met and conferred on an as-needed basis,

and called for three congregational meetings, including November and February congregational meetings, as well as the required annual meeting in May. They also held a retreat in August.

FUNDRAISING

In December, the First U Board ensured that our annual UniFair took place. The event raised \$7,800, under the leadership of Eva Rogals-Weiss and Abby Grosslein, with help from Lee Pardee, Langdon Holloway, and Mariasara Alcott.

The Board also supported the work of the Stewardship team. Under Spencer Brill’s creative leadership, they took a new approach – to gather anticipation and momentum, before encouraging everyone to pledge in a single day. To gather this momentum, a dozen in-home ‘kindling gatherings’ were held, at which members were encouraged to share warm memories of moments at First Unitarian, as well as socializing to deepen relationships. We are grateful to Coleen & Dwight Olson, Robin Bossert, Amanda Almond & Anthony Silvestri, James Goward & Jackie Frost, Mike & Mariasara Alcott, Cara Haft & Rick Smigielski, Allen & Ann Kone, Sarah Karstaedt, Laurel Lesio & Bert Eisenstadt, Lee Pardee, and Lisa Pacenza for hosting these events!

The Board also selected the beneficiary of the winter appeal fundraiser. In 2025, the appeal funded supplies to build acoustical panels for the undercroft, which a subset of the Facilities Committee built and installed in the spring of 2026. The panels have made a noticeable difference in the noise level in the space during coffee hour.

COMMITTEES

The members of the Board of Trustees are also blessed to share the responsibility of being liaisons to the many committees that do the important work of our congregation.

The Board Members and the committees with their primary contact are listed below. This year saw the integration of the Immigrant Solidarity Committee into the Social Justice Committee. The Men’s Group is finding their meetings to be well attended and their programming appreciated!

Committee	Liaison	Committee Contact
Brooklyn UUs for Justice in the Middle East	Michael Dore	Jennie Goldin & Kate O’Day
Caring Ministry	Amanda Nietzel	Michelle Kuchik
Connections	Luke Messina	Luke Messina
Deacons	Mark Weiss	Patrick Gunn
Facilities	Anne Calder	Tom Check, Liz Davis, Allen Kohn
Finance	Vicki Antonini	Lee Pardee
Green Team	Anne Calder	Jan Thompson
Leadership Development Committee	Barbara Bornmann	Judith Sedaitis, Maxine Schuloff

Queer Caucus-Rainbow	Jake Powell	Susan May, Andre Tirenin
Men's Group	Luke Messina	Charles Lynch
Religious Education	Marci Mehta	Becky Huffman
Share the Plate	Amanda Nietzel	Parrish Turner
Stewardship	Vicki Antonini	Spencer Brill
Tech	Mark Weiss	Jay Lawrence
Social Justice	Barbara Bornmann	Ian Holmes
Women's Leadership Alliance	Michael Dore	Beth Evans
Young Adults	Jake Powell	Robbie Economou

NOTABLE EVENTS

Ministerial Leadership

- Brought the leadership model to a vote and closed out the investigation of co-ministry
- Held cottage meetings on the ministerial model, led by the Transition Team
- Extended the search to a third year, and extended Rev. Micah's contract to a third year
- Convened Special Nominating Committee
- Selected Search Committee

UU Organizations

- Submitted a request to join the NYS Convention of Universalists
- Sent five delegates to the UU GA

Staff

- Hired Tyrone Davis Jr. as Membership Coordinator
- Expanded Wendy Russell's role
- Enlisted the help of Cassandra Narcisse for bookkeeping
- Brought on Sean Sellers as the new leader of the Youth Group
- Brought on Becky Huffman as Interim DRE
- Searched for a new DRE (and expecting to hire imminently!)
- Hired John McKeown as Building Engineer
- Promoted Bobby Blackman to resident sexton

Board and Community

- Raised funds for, replaced, and assembled new risers for the choir
- Painted the chapel (thanks to the Men's Group)
- Held 'Meet a Friend Sunday'
- Added a Board member to the Welcome Table each week, to improve accessibility and communication

- Held 2nd annual MLK Day of Service
- Strengthened affinity groups; we now have groups for people who are queer, identify as men, are from Christian backgrounds, and are from Jewish backgrounds
- Funded, built, and installed acoustic panels in Undercroft, thanks to the Facilities Committee & Winter Appeal
- Hosted Prof. Rashid Khalidi for a well-attended talk, organized by BUUJME

Submitted by the Board

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEACONS 2025-2026

The Deacons are Senior Deacon, Constance Newsom, Robert Bero, Thomas Check, Elizabeth Davis, Beth Evans, Patrick Gunn, Laurel Lesio-Eisenstadt, Edwin Lord, Emily (Lee) Pardee, and Nancy Wolf.

The By-Laws of the Congregation stipulate "There shall be ten Deacons, each of whom shall hold office for life or until a Deacon resigns their position or is removed from the Membership Roll."

"Upon the death or resignation of a Deacon, the remaining Deacons, together with the Senior Minister, shall propose to a Membership Meeting the name of at least one qualified and available Member to fill the office of Deacon. ... nomination by petition shall not apply."

"The Deacons shall be available to: assist the Ministers in conducting any communion service; assist at the funeral or memorial service of a Member, if so requested by the Member's survivors; advise and assist the Ministers in promoting the health of the Society."

The Deacons assisted Rev. Micah Ma in the Good Friday Commemorative Communion, April 3, 2026.

Deacons ushered regularly on Sunday mornings during the past year. At the request of the family, the Deacons also ushered for the memorial of Sara Faison, wife of the late Senior Deacon, Seth Faison. The Deacons ushered on April 25 at the memorial of Nancy Witherell, long-time member and wife of Deacon Thomas Check.

During the past year, individual Deacons also served on the following Committees: Ministerial, Intern, the Board, Finance (Chair), Facilities, Shawl and Craft, Green Team, Immigrant Solidarity, Social Justice, Women's Leadership Alliance, UniFair, Book Club

The Deacons oversee the management and fee structure of the Congregation's burial ground, Vista Hill in Green-Wood Cemetery.

Respectfully submitted,
Constance Newsom
April, 2026

Finance Committee Annual Report FY25-26

The Finance Committee monitors the financial health of the congregation. It meets monthly to review revenues and expenses in comparison to the budget. The committee also conducts quarterly reviews of the congregation's books to ensure that revenues are reported correctly and all significant expenses have corresponding approved invoices.

This year the Committee welcomed new member RJ Carey and Vicki Antonini (Board Liaison) and returning member Lisa Pacenza. We saw the departure of member David Andrew after several years of dedicated service. Jason Hershberger, Lorna Hollander, Lee Pardee (Treasurer), and Lake Wise continued as members.

FY24-25

This year again started off on a positive note. Like the last four fiscal years, the FY24-25 Operating Budget ended up under budget, by \$9500.

The FY25 capital budget, however, was substantially over budget. We spent \$1,059,000 which was \$400,000 more than budgeted. \$846,000 of expenses were for the façade project. The remaining \$213,000 paid for portions of the new fire alarm system and the new boiler. The board approved taking out a line of credit to pay for some of these expenses. The remainder were paid for from the general endowment (façade) and the capital reserve (other projects).

We had one off-budget item – Rev. Ana's employment release payment which totaled \$148,000.

FY25-26

This year the committee continued its regular work of monitoring revenue and expenses monthly and reviewing the congregation's books in detail each quarter. For the first nine months of this fiscal year operating revenues have been slightly over budget and expenses have been slightly under budget. The last quarter of the fiscal year is crucial for meeting year-end pledge and fundraising goals. In addition, quite a few expenses come in at the end of the year. Because both Rev. Meagan Henry and Garnett Losak ended their employment with First Unitarian this year, we are seeing savings, which we hope will significantly reduce the operating budget draw on the budget.

The congregation has been drawing on our endowment significantly to pay for the repair of the façade. The general endowment has been reduced by over \$1 million during this project. While there is currently over \$3 million in the endowment, the Finance Committee and the Board are discussing how to replenish the endowment, including a capital campaign in the not distant future.

In FY26 the Committee:

- Continued to work with Congregational Administrator Wendy Russell, Bookkeeper Cassandra Narcisse, and a CPA consultant to improve bookkeeping practices for the operating and capital budgets.
- Conducted monthly reviews of the congregation's financial reports.
- Completed quarterly reviews of the congregation's accounts.
- Met with First Unitarian's financial advisor from Boston Trust Walden to ensure that the congregation's endowment funds are being invested according to our social screens and also in a manner to maximize earnings without undue risk.

- Worked with the Board of Trustees and Staff to draft FY27 operating budget that supports and expands the congregation's programming while keeping the draw on the endowment to cover the operating deficit below the calculated sustainable level.
- Worked with the Board of Trustees and Facilities Management Committee to draft FY27 capital budget to finance the façade repair and continue other important capital projects to maintain our facilities in good working order.
- Conducted one online and one in-person congregational budget forum prior to the annual meeting.

Many thanks to this year's members.

If you are a member of the congregation who is interested in joining the Finance Committee, please contact Treasurer Lee Pardee, leepardee54@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted by Lee Pardee, Treasurer, for the Finance Committee - Members: Vicki Antonini (Board Liaison), David Andrew, RJ Carey, Jason Hershberger, Lorna Hollander, Lisa Pacenza, and Lake Wise.

Leadership Development Committee

The duties of the Leadership Development Committee shall be to (i) promote the development of leadership by evaluating the potential of individual Members, identifying needs and opportunities for leadership in the Society, identifying resources to aid in leadership development, encouraging Members to use such resources to develop their leadership ability, and recommending Members to the Board for appointment to Mandated Committees. (ii) propose the names of at least one qualified and available Member of the Society for: (i) each position on the Board of Trustees to be filled at the next Annual Membership Meeting; (ii) each position as a delegate for the upcoming General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association...; (iii) each position on the Leadership Development Committee to be filled at the next Annual Membership Meeting; (iv) Clerk; and (v) Moderator. (FUUB Bylaws, section 5.3(d).”

For the 2025-26 year, the members of the LDC were: Judith Sedaitis (Chair), Maxine Schulof, Beth Evans, Sean Hastings (secretary), and Edwin Lord. Significant support was provided to the committee by Rev Micah.

We met monthly on zoom beginning in September, then biweekly from January – May 2026. This work of fielding GA, Board, and other standard positions took up the majority of the time of the committee. Due to Rev. Micha’s pioneering suggestions, the committee expanded by creating two new initiatives: creating a committee (chaired by Sean Hastings) to organize the summer lay services. Also, an expanded role for the LDC was explored in which it would possibly help fill leaderships vacuums with new congregants interested in expanding their service to First U.

Judith and Edwin will conclude their terms after the Annual Meeting on May 17, 2026. Beth Evans, Sean Hastings, and Maxine Schulof will continue to serve on the LDC.

2026 General Assembly Nominees: Six delegates were elected at the Congregational Meeting on February 22, 2026: Nancy Russell, Topher Soltys, Luke Messina, Robbie Economou and Matthew Billman.

GA will be held online this year. Through the generosity of the Women’s Leadership Alliance, all delegates upon application will receive \$350 to cover the registration cost .

Nominees for Leadership Positions to be presented at the 2025 Annual Meeting Board of Trustees, Class of 2028 (three-year terms): Cyndi Kerr Robert Brackbill, Linda Guidi

Moderator: James Goward (third term)

TBD: Clerk of the Congregation and 2 new members of the Leadership Development Committee. We thank the current LDC for all their efforts during this particularly difficult year for fielding leadership positions when so many of our leaders were working on transitional issues due to our Senior Minister search.

Submitted by Judith Sedaitis

Unitarian universalists for justice in the middle east (buujme)

Overview & Mission

Brooklyn Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (BUUJME) is committed to advancing justice, equity, and liberation for the Palestinian people by challenging systems of oppression and promoting collective action.

Grounded in principles of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and human rights, we work to end U.S. support for Israel's military occupation and apartheid regime while advocating for the total liberation, self-determination, and right of return for Palestinians.

Through education, solidarity, and action, we challenge systems of violence and work towards a future of freedom, dignity, and equity for all people.

Events, Fundraising & Education

- Bake sale raising funds for Palestinian families
- Thousand Years War - a discussion with Professor Rashid Khalidi and Rev Meagan Henry
- Excerpts from the Thousand Years War are going to be used in an upcoming episode of "Essential Dissent" a podcast on public radio - Radio4All.
- Upcoming : Discussion with Morgan Cooper, and Handmade Palestine Bazaar

Projects and Collaborations

We are part of the greater UUJME national chapter and looking forward to collaborating with them in the future. Ideas for potential future projects include film screenings, book discussions, cultural events, speakers, and teach-out sessions. These would be designed to offer further education and fundraising opportunities.

Committee Members: Mariam Bardakas, Jennie Goldin, Madi Markham, Skye Miller, Kate O'Day, Tess O'Day, Rita Pearl, Yasmine Weil-Pourfard, Michael White and Winnie Zwick, An additional 45 members stay informed via email.

Staff Liaison – Rev Micah Ma Board Liaison – Micheal Dore

Submitted by Kate O'Day and Jennie Goldin

Caring Ministry - 2025-2026 Program Year

Members:

- Core Members: Michelle Kuchuk (Chair), Daniel Walters, Eva Rogals Weiss, Beth Evans
- Staff: Rev. Micah Ma, Yvonne Garrett
- Pastoral Care after services: Michelle Kuchuk, Daniel Walters, ET Boyle, Beth Zehe
- Reserve Members: Barbara Ratzlaff, Edwin Lord, Spencer Brill, Erin Hopkins, Dirk Elting, Aasiyah Abdulsalam, Isabel Leonard-Rose, Dan Vonnegut, Judith Sedaitis

Meetings & Communication:

- Core Members meet regularly throughout the program year.
- Core Members also communicate consistently via email between meetings, as Caring Ministry tasks and needs occur consistently and regularly.
- Pastoral Care Members serve in the Chapel of All Faiths after every service, coordinating with each other to make sure there is always coverage.
- The Chair communicates with Reserve Members on an as-needed basis, particularly for extra or unique support.

The Caring Ministry 25-26 Program Year Highlights:

- The Caring Ministry supports First U by:
 - o Pastoral Care: Michelle, Daniel, ET, and Beth Z. provide pastoral care in the Chapel of All Faiths after services on a rotating basis.
 - o Check-In Notes/Emails/Phone Calls: we send these check-ins or reach out on an as needed and sometimes ongoing basis to folks in need of emotional support, or who need someone to talk to, or are otherwise going through a difficult time, or who could use further follow-up (i.e., after a staff member flags an issue, or after an initial reach out, or after a pastoral care session).
 - o Grief Support: members send cards and/or reach out via phone to convey condolences
 - o In-person visits: members also make caring visits to congregants.
 - o Meals, Medical, & Other Practical Support: members of this ministry also deliver meals, visit or help congregants with doctor/hospital related needs, or provide other ongoing support on an as needed basis.
 - o Strategizing and Responding to Unique Needs: members of this ministry have worked with staff to respond to unique needs from the community (i.e., a UU from another congregation facing food insecurity, other members of the community who had unmet basic needs)
- This was the second year that the Caring Ministry included both core members and reserve members (formerly named “support/ad-hoc members”). We identified the need for this two years ago; some people in our First U community would love to help, but can’t commit to meetings, and/or are not members of First U. The Caring Ministry now includes both. The Core Members are the folks that do the bulk of the work for the Caring Ministry. They must attend most meetings, and must be members of First U. Reserve Members help us out by filling in when there’s a lot of need, and/or when a unique or particular need is warranted.

- This year, we continued to build out the Resource List with resources & referrals for various community needs.
- Michelle provided several 1:1 orientations/trainings for prospective caring ministry members who would ultimately serve in the pastoral care role.
- In the coming program year (and with adjustments to the kitchen), it is our aim to have another Meal Making Initiative to easily provide meals for people. We were able to secure a dedicated freezer this year (thank you, Beth Evans!) – now all we need is a stove/oven!

The Caring Ministry is made up of extremely generous, thoughtful, and caring individuals, both staff and congregants. It is my honor to work with such committed and warm-hearted people. I'd like to dedicate the Caring Ministry's portion of this year's report to Nancy Witherell, who was a dedicated and stalwart member of the Caring Ministry for many years.

Submitted by Michelle Kuchuk, Chair

Connections Committee

Mission Statement:

The Connections' Committee of The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn works to help our congregation welcome newcomers, and deepen members & relationship to the community.

Summary:

The Connections Committee works to welcome and connect folks to all of the different ways to get involved with the congregation. We manage and staff the welcome table, conduct outreach to new members/recent visitors, sponsor events, and support the development of affinity groups.

Members:

Lee Pardee, Luke Messina (Interim Chair/Board Liaison), Tyrone Davis Jr. (Staff Liaison), Allen Kone, Maxine Schulof, Charles Lynch, Colleen Olsen, Brian Elig, Lexi Perlmutter, Brian Elig.

Special thanks to Elenor Traubman, Charlotte Hoogenboom, and Reverend Micha Ma.

Meetings:

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month, at 6:30pm. Meetings rotate between in person and on Zoom. The committee chair(s) facilitate and take notes. The agenda is crafted collaboratively through email, where members add points. All of our meeting notes are saved and can be furnished upon request.

Accomplishments:

Welcome table

We continue to staff the welcome table during coffee hour each Sunday. This ensures there is always an accessible place for folks to stay informed about the different happenings in the congregation, and there is always someone to help guide people to where they need to go. This table also provides a place for newcomers to fill out and/or return their welcome cards, and ask questions!

Working with the board

Connections also now works with the board to staff the welcome table. This is part of broader efforts to increase access to the Board of Trustees.

Atlantic Antic

We secured and helped staff a table at the 'Atlantic Antic' where we spoke with members of the public and handed out information about our congregation. This was part of a goal from last year to do a broader community outreach event to spread awareness of the congregation and what we have to offer.

Connections Retreat

Former chair Charlotte Hoogenboom led a day-long retreat to build group cohesion and brainstorm for the year.

Navigated change

The Director of Congregational Life (DCL), Garnett Losak, was a key member of our group. A great deal of the committee's work was supporting the DCL's work, and we needed to re-think our core goals and mission as staffing at the congregation was restructured. With Tyrone Davis Jr. stepping into the new role of Membership Coordinator, we worked as a team to rethink the committee. We launched a new structure and mission statement.

Plans for 2026

Foster more affinity/covenant groups

We have a men's group, women's group, and queer community group, and religious naturalism that we support. There are more groups that have interest though. We would like to continue to pursue this in the new year.

In community outreach

We would like to have more of a presence in community events that go on throughout Brooklyn. This will help us boost the profile and work of the congregation, and welcome more people into our community.

New members

Continuing to support welcoming culture by supporting the membership coordinators efforts. This includes helping with new member ceremonies and community building events. How this looks in 2026 after a year of change is still ongoing.

Submitted by Luke Messina

GREEN TEAM

Overview & Mission

The Green Team, established by congregational vote at the 2019 Annual Meeting, encourages congregants to actively engage in building a just, livable society and promotes sustainability throughout our building and congregational practices. Our work is grounded in the 7th Principle: “Respect for the Interconnected Web of which we are a part.”

Events & Worship

This year the Green Team hosted two congregational programs:

- March 1, 2026 — Panel: Is Nuclear Power New York’s Energy Future? (Chapel) An informal debate featuring panelists from Shut Down Indian Point, NY Communities for Change, and Nuclear New York. The event explored the pros and cons of Governor Hochul’s new nuclear energy plan for New York State, offering congregants a range of perspectives on this complex and consequential issue.
- May 3, 2026 — Recycling Wisdom Story (Sanctuary) A children’s story and congregational teaching session on proper recycling practices. Designed to help both children and adults understand Brooklyn’s recycling rules and ensure we are sorting items correctly in our building and at home.

Ongoing Initiatives

Climate Action Google Group

The Climate Action Google Group continues to serve as our email hub for climate justice news, actions, and opportunities. Launched in January 2019, the group currently has approximately 90 subscribers. We welcome broader participation from the congregation beyond Green Team members — contact marymost@msn.com to be added.

Projects We Hope to Advance

The Green Team would like to renew conversations with the Facilities team on two projects that were identified in prior years but have not yet moved forward:

- **LED Lighting Upgrade** — A proposal was developed to replace tubular fluorescent, compact fluorescent, and incandescent fixtures across 50M and 48M with modern LED lighting. This upgrade could reduce lighting electricity use by approximately 66%, with an estimated annual savings of \$3,800–\$5,200 depending on grid pricing. ConEd incentives may be available to offset upfront costs. We would like to revisit this with Facilities and explore a path to approval.
- **Mini-Split Sub-Meter Installation** — The Chapel and FWR mini-split air-source heat pump (ASHP), installed in 2022, was never properly equipped with a dedicated electricity sub-meter, making it impossible to track actual energy use. Installing this meter is a prerequisite for accurately assessing the ASHP’s performance and building the case for using it for heating (in addition to cooling), which could reduce emissions compared to the existing gas boiler.

Projects We Hope to Advance

The Green Team remains committed to education, congregational engagement, and advocacy on climate and sustainability issues. Following the board's decision, we will not be pursuing Green Sanctuary Certification at this time. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the congregation and welcome new members who want to get involved.

Submitted by: Jan Thompson (Chair), Robin Bossert, Anne Calder, Nina Grey, Mary Most, Colleen Olson, Isuru Seneviratne, Nancy Wolf

MEN'S GROUP ANNUAL REPORT

ORIGINS: The Men's Group at First Unitarian Congregational Society first met in November 2024. Charles H. Lynch convened the meeting. Our Sunday gatherings begin with lighting the chalice and reading the "Men's Group Covenant (revised 11-15-2024)" based upon the larger Unitarian Universalist covenant.

MISSION STATEMENT: Under the direction of Asher Sosinsky, we are revising and finalizing a mission statement to be shared on the congregation's website. So far, the gist of it reads as follows: "The Men's Group welcomes all who identify as a man, male, and/or masculine person. Our mission is to provide a supportive, non-judgmental space for participants to discuss meaningful topics, share personal stories, and communicate their feelings. We aim to foster community, friendship, and spiritual growth by also becoming active in the larger First Unitarian congregation."

MEETINGS: Each month we meet on the second Sunday from 12:45-2:15 P.M. and share casual conversation on the fourth Monday from 6:30 to 8:30 in The Library. Newcomers are always welcome. Over sixty men are on the email list and receive regular notifications, such as the "Notes and Schedule" announcing and summarizing our meetings; an updated list of names, email addresses, and phones; official messages from others in the congregation directed towards our group; and individual members reaching out. We agreed not to publicly announce our discussion topics, some of which can be private and personal. Most of them address Unitarian values and how to enact them, social and psychological challenges men face, the impacts of current events, and how to contribute to the wider community. We thanked Spencer Brill for his leadership. He will remain active but had to focus more on other responsibilities.

UNSPENT BUDGET: Unfortunately, we did not spend the \$250 assigned for our budget in the church's fiscal year. Now a budget director, Paul Robinson, will oversee that responsibility.

T-SHIRT CAMPAIGN: A three-person task force (Brian Elig, Rick Smigielski, Andre Tirenin) began a T-shirt campaign in winter 2026 with two goals: (1) reaffirming the congregation's spiritual solidarity and welcoming the larger community, and (2) raising funds to contribute to First U's mission. The "You Be You" message T-shirts began selling in May for \$25 (with a possible discount for kids).

INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS: As a Men's Group we wish to encourage and participate in alliances with youth, women, and the Queer community. We will explore ways to reach out and to become active together.

SAN DIEGO CONTACT: Allen Kone, one of our members, has been active in the Unitarian men's group in San Diego, California, in the past. He has put us in touch with Mike Dorfi, the coordinator of that very successful group. We plan to consult with him to learn how his experience can benefit us.

Submitted by Charles Lynch

Queer Community @ First UU Brooklyn

Mission Statement:

Queer Community @ First U (QC) is an affinity group of LGBTQ+ members and friends at the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn. For its members, QC is dedicated to providing fellowship and fun, support and solidarity, an opportunity to network, and a queer space for inter-generational spiritual exploration. For the larger congregation, QC offers educational opportunities on issues that affect the queer community. And for the world at large QC works with the congregation and other groups to fight for issues regarding justice, equality and inclusivity. We look forward to coming together as we build strength through solidarity.

Co-Facilitators:

Andre Tirenin, Susan May, Lauren Dohr

There is no hierarchy within the QC group. All members are encouraged to suggest and lead activities, events and discussions. The facilitators help guide the group and manage communications.

Board Liaison:

Luke Messina

Members and Meetings:

- There are currently 62 members on the QC listserv.
- The Queer Community meets in person at First U the first Sunday of each month.
- On average there are about 12-17 attendees at each meeting.
- Our first meeting of the newly formed QC was on Sunday, November 2, 2025.
- At each meeting we choose a topic for discussion. Past topics have been:
 - Who has left a mark on your life?
 - What are one (or two) things that give you hope at this time?
 - We have also touched on subjects such as “Coming out” and “Queer Spiritual Journey.”
- Our April 5, 2026 and May 3, 2026 were planning sessions for the First U Pride Celebration, Brooklyn Pride Twilight Parade, NYC Pride March and Brooklyn Pride Interfaith Worship Service. Pizza provided during the May 3 meeting.

Current Activities:

- On January 4, 2026 we had a social gathering which was brunch at The Custom House on Montague Street. Six members were in attendance.
- On January 30, 2026 a number of the QC members, and other congregants attended the ICE OUT March in NYC
- On March 28, 2026 a number of the QC members, and other congregants attended the No Kings March in NYC
- On December 14, 2025, March 28, 2026, and April 18-19 2026, a number of

the QC members, and other congregants went to experience and support Jae Walsh, 1st U and QC member, in their Queer Big Apple Corps symphonic band performances at various venues

- June 2026 Activities will consist of these Pride-focused events (all QC members and general congregation are welcome):
 - June 7, 2026 - Pride Service and Pride Celebration (Drag Bingo) - partnering with the Social Justice Committee and Rev. Micah Ma
 - June 13, 2026 - Brooklyn Pride Twilight Parade
 - June 17, 2026 - Brooklyn Pride Interfaith Worship Service, supporting Rev. Micah Ma and Adam Podd
 - June 28, 2026 - NYC Pride March, in coordination with New York-area UU queer groups and congregations

Future Activities:

- Future Activities that have been discussed, include:
 - A tour of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn
 - Queer film and queer film festival attendance, at the LGBTQIA+ Community Center and other locations
 - Social lunch/brunch gatherings
 - Continued protest march attendance
 - Love & Fury: New York's Fight Against AIDS at Poster house

Religious Education Annual Report 2026

First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn Religious Education Mission Statement:

- *Offer opportunities for children, youth, and adults to grow their souls, develop their Unitarian Universalist identities, and deepen their understanding of our diverse world.*
- *Create joyful experiences that will support families in becoming healthier and more connected, and to build a community together that nurtures and supports all children and youth in their spiritual and personal development.*
- *Teach children, youth, and adults how to develop a strong and resilient faith and help them develop spiritual practices that will sustain and support them all their lives.*

This year was full of both great change and continued traditions. We said goodbye to Rev Meagan Henry in November as she started a new ministry at the UU Shelter Rock congregation. Becky Huffman took up the role of interim RE coordinator, and we began the search for a new full time Director of Religious Education. The new DRE will start August 1st. In the midst of a ministerial and staff change, many things stayed the same.

Family Events

We played games on cold Saturday nights in January and February.

We spent a cold, snowy weekend at Murray Grove in February.

We spend sunny Sunday afternoons at Pierrepont Playground

Holidays

We held our annual Halloween party, a Spring Festival and an end of year June Birthday Party. Our Family Christmas Eve service continues to be a beloved tradition for local families with young children. This year's pageant was The Grinch. We continued the now time-honored tradition of a congregational "snowball" fight (using paper). Our Easter service and Fire Communion is becoming nearly as popular with the wider Brooklyn community as our Christmas Eve Candlelight service.

The RE program couldn't run without our amazing staff!

RE Assistant: Wendy Russell / Youth Group Coordinator: Sean Sellers / Sunday runner: Adrian Weber
Nursery/Pre K teachers: Phylisa St Fleur and Ruby Stackhouse, Olive Benesh and Prudence Parkinson

We are so grateful for our teachers and advisors.

- OWL K/1 team: Amanda White, Marci Lucia, Deirdre Lord, George Johnson
- Children's Chapel Leader: Emily Hockaday
- Elementary Teachers: Eva Rogals Weiss, Rachel Michael, Madison Markham, Amy Foote, Darby Foreman, Kelly Schaffer, Mark Rinzel, Robbie Economou
- COA: Becky Huffman, RJ Carey, Mentors: Sean Hastings, Bill Wasik, Ginny Fahs, Skye Miller
- Youth Group Advisors: Bob Bero, Jules Tramontana, Carol Covelli
- Children's Choir Director: Bert Eisenstadt

Thank you to the members of the RE Council: Emily Hockaday, RJ Carey, Rachel Michael, Marci Lucia (Board Liaison), Keledy Kenkel, Sean Sellers, Wendy Russell

Thank you to the DRE search committee: Maria Maida, Liz Jones, Erin Hopkins, Emily Hockaday, Sean Sellers, Lily Bongiorno (youth member)

There are 77 children and youth registered for RE this year!

Thank you to all our families, new and long standing members who volunteered, donated, baked, helped, cheered and supported our staff, teachers, children and youth during this challenging year. ~ Submitted by Becky Huffman

Religious Naturalism Study Group FY25-26

The Religious Naturalism Study Group (RNSG) of First U Brooklyn was incepted at an organizational meeting on October 12, 2025. We are grateful to the Connections Committee for supporting us through the set-up phase of this new affinity group.

Many UU congregations, including ours, embrace members who do not closely identify with the traditional models of religious faith, but who share UU humanist values. These members generally look to reason and evidence for solutions to social and environmental problems and to create meaning. A term that has come into use in recent years is “spiritual but not religious.” A term with a longer history is “religious naturalist.” The RN Group aspires to be a setting in which to explore philosophical topics grounded in a concept of human nature as a product of our evolution. We seek also to create shared experiences of existential joy in our beautiful blue boat home.

We have held three meetings in 2026 devoted mainly to refining Group structure and planning for future events and activities. We are preparing to welcome Professor Emerita (retired) Ursula Goodenough, long-time UU and President of the Religious Naturalism Association, to our Sunday service on October 25, 2026. The Group is convening an event after the service where congregants and guests can engage in conversation with Ursula centered on her book “The Sacred Depths of Nature” (second edition published in 2023).

Submitted by Maggie Norris

Shawl Ministry

The Shawl Ministry gathers to create shawls for members needing comfort or leaving First Unitarian. We also provide shawls for graduating youth. In the past year we provided shawls for adult members Kay Corkett, Rita Pearl, and Kate Ramsey and for graduating youth Molly Castle, Summer Gertz, and Emmett Wasik.

During the program year the Shawl/Crafts Ministry meets twice monthly – First Thursdays online and Third Sundays in the undercroft during Fellowship Hour. The ministry is coordinated by Lee Pardee, Mary Most and Michele Ascione. We have add tags to the shawls to let recipients know the creator, the type of yarn, and how to care for their shawl. The Shawl Ministry continues to provide community for its members and pastoral acknowledgement to its recipients.

Social Justice/Immigrant Solidarity

This report is coming soon! Please keep an eye out for an addendum in the coming days.

Stewardship

Our Stewardship theme this year was Lighting Our Fire. The campaign launched on March 1st with a sermon of the same name by Rev. Micah.

A letter from Rev. Micah was mailed to all members and friends of the congregation the week following the launch.

Several years ago, we launched an on-line stewardship form. Two years ago, we added a QR Code for easy access, which was included in the order of service for several weeks throughout the campaign. While some people still prefer a paper form, 90% of respondents prefer to declare their pledges electronically.

This year, we updated the Stewardship program from last year, which had already been revised from years past. First and foremost, we asked members *not to pledge*, until a specific date, at which time we would reveal the 'fire': a posterboard covered in the individual flames with the names of pledging members. The event held on week 5 of the campaign was well received.

Additionally, the team recruited 15 families to host events in their homes over the 7 weeks of the campaign. We called these "Kindling Gatherings" to bring members closer together and remind one another why we are a part of this community. Events included cocktail parties and dinners, vinyl listening parties and brunches, and even a couple of Zoom meetings to accommodate members who are not physically at services. During the entire campaign, members and friends were invited to sign-up for events that took place over the 7-week period. We signaled the end of the campaign with a Pie Party in the chapel, where we served pie and ice cream to pledging members and friends, and held a raffle of some delicious treats and other goodies.

The good news: as of this writing one year ago we had \$268,000 in pledge commitments. This year's number is \$291,000! Returning pledges are up 10.85% so far this year. The average overall increase of individual pledges jumped 14%. We anticipate more pledges coming in over the next two months, as well as an estimated \$20,000+ from new members in the coming fiscal year (historical average).

The response is encouraging but many of our members are still reluctant to complete pledge forms during the campaign. Roughly 21% of previously pledging families or members have not pledged this year (as of this writing), leaving us significantly short of our \$360,000 goal. As a result, the stewardship team has been working diligently to figure out how to provide timely information with care, while maintaining a warm and inviting approach.

To address these concerns, we are:

- Hoping to assist the leadership in finding ways to structure deadlines and bylaws that would increase the effectiveness of early planning and timely completion of forms.
- Looking into having year-round 'kindling gathering' equivalents to foster greater communal strength and retention.
- Planning to continue a warm and inviting approach, to make the experience as enticing and happy for all parties involved.
- Providing greater clarity and year-round education to members and friends about stewardship, the costs of running our congregation, and what being a member in good standing means (and how pledging fits into all of that).

- Continuing to engage the help of friends of the congregation who have given immensely of their time and knowledge, and who helped make a direct impact to improve the outcome of this campaign season, with their deep insight into fundraising and approach to charitable giving campaigns.
- Starting the planning process for the season earlier to allow for more events to accommodate more members and friends.
- Looking into expanding the Stewardship team through 'core' and 'auxiliary' members for different initiatives and help as needed.

Thank you to our incredible stewardship team for their hard work, quick-thinking, and trust in the process: Lee Pardee, Erin Hopkins, Rick Smigielski, Sarah Karstaedt, Tracie Morris, Peggy Schubert, and Vicki Antonini (Board Liaison)

Submitted by Spencer Brill (Chair)

Ushers and Greeters 2026

Ushers and Greeters are the first people that visitors meet when coming to First Unitarian for the first time. Out of our congregation of 250+ members, over 50 have signed up to usher and greet and at least half of them have volunteered in the past year. In addition, our youths usher and greet once or twice each year as part of their service to the congregation. Head ushers are trained to operate the wheelchair lift for anyone who needs this. Lee Pardee creates the online Signup Genius that lets people volunteer and tracks it to ensure we are fully staffed for each service.

In addition to welcoming visitors and newcomers and helping them find their way, ushers also gather the weekly offertory and ensure that this is given to the designated counters. Head ushers count and document the attendance each week. Ushers assist with the rituals of special services such as Ingathering, Make-a-Friend Sunday, Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday and Easter, distributing water, palms, plants and more. And ushers also assist with the annual fire drill, ensuring that all attendees exit the sanctuary quickly and safely.

Women's Leadership Alliance

During the current leadership, the First U Women's Leadership Alliance has evolved from a largely grant-making organization as established during the pandemic to a more active organization, with members taking on programmatic initiatives. We continue to sustain the most valued, and valuable, aspects of the mission and purpose of the WLA and serve as responsible stewards of the WLA endowment.

Beth Evans and Vonda Brunsting served in their new positions respectively as President and Vice-President/President-Elect, Lisa Pacenza continued as Treasurer beyond her terms and Nancy Russell took on the role of secretary. Cyndi Kerr and Mary Most continued in their roles as Members-at-Large. Judith Sedaitis joined the WLA Executive Board as the third Member-at-Large.

Many thanks to all executive board members for their leadership this past year.

Achievements

Organizational

- Outreach to build membership through participation in the fall Faith in Action Expo and through continued responses to email and in-person has brought in new participants.
- Efforts made to reach our goal to offer monthly programming, some in person and some online, run by, and for, WLA and First U members. This past year programming included:
 - A presentation at the September luncheon by Naw Hser Hser of the Karen Women's Organization who was in New York to speak at the United Nations. Vonda arranged for the speaker.
 - Presentation on the history of the WLA. Colleen Olsen presented.
 - Presentation by the four most recently elected Clara Barton Sisters, Kay Corkett, Colleen Olsen, Rita Pearl and Nancy Russell, on their UU paths.
 - Lesson on a spoon protest dance as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day events held at First U. Vonda organized the event.
- Work done to support other communities that are part of First U Brooklyn including:
 - Social Justice Committee teach-in on reproductive justice in September. Judith took the lead on this.
 - Soul Matters Curriculum implementation across the congregation. Both Judith and Cyndi participated as leaders in this initiative of the minister.
- Continued community and advocacy grants including support for
 - Undue Medical Debt. Members Paula Shirk and Elizabeth Smith spearheaded this effort.
 - Built membership community through second annual women's retreat at Stony Point Center. Judith led on this event. The WLA provided scholarship support and contributed funding toward the overall event. Twenty women registered for and 19 attended the two day retreat, including five members of the WLA Executive Board

Administrative

- Maintained structured request process and forms for leadership development and program grants
- Researched to discover if there are members who are eligible for Clara Barton Sisterhood
- Used Google folders that provides transparent, shared access to organized files
- Made efforts towards building a WLA full membership google group.
- Clarified types of grants available: Leadership, Advocacy, Programming. The WLA also administers the Campobasso Fund, a separate financial resource for women in our community with health-related financial issues.
- Membership dues are voluntary and directed to Campobasso fund.

National

- Became an inaugural Affiliate of the UU Women's Federation. Held a call with Ann Wiesner, Executive Director, UUWF and will remain in touch regarding educational components and shared action with the three other early stage affiliate organizations.

Financial

- We did not stay below the prudent draw this year. Last year the membership voted to withdraw more than the prudent draw to cover the intern expense.
- Financial picture (as of April 2026)
 - Campobasso Fund balance: 1,936
 - WLA Endowment balance: 588,465
 - JPMorgan stock value: 148,058 (473 shares)
 - WLA operating account balance: 8,382
- Income YTD: 22,131
- Expenses YTD: 17,576
- Provided grant to fund half of the salary of intern minister Yvonne Garrett (NEW)
- UUWF contribution
- Provided grants as follows (as of April of 2026)
- Leadership:
 - Provided \$1500 grant to support Abby Soule's graduate student research into the consequences of OWL instruction.
 - Provided grants for five First U GA delegates for June 2026
- Programming: Women's Retreat, WLA Luncheon/Annual Meeting
- Advocacy: Undue Medical Debt \$1500, Remaining advocacy funds will be distributed per the decision of the membership.

Report completed by members of the WLA Board

Young Adult Ministry (YAM)

The Young Adult Ministries (YAM) group has continued to create events for fellow young adults at First Unitarian Brooklyn this year. The group meets monthly to do a Spiritual Discussion group, which acts as a chance to connect and to hear each other's insights on a given topic. The YAM group also plans several picnic outings in parks around NYC in the Spring/Summer/Fall, which are open to any Young Adult UUs and friends from all around the New York City area. The WhatsApp group for YAM has over 120 members.

Submitted by Robbie Enonomou