

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Plattsburgh
4 Palmer Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

June 8, 2025 Annual Congregational Meeting

Welcome/Call to Order: Connie Shemo and Nicholas Hunt-Bull called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending.

Opening Words and Chalice lighting: Rev. Nicoline

Quorum: A quorum count was called by Co-Chair, Nicholas Hunt-Bull. With 4 members on zoom and 28 in the sanctuary, quorum was met.

Bylaws Revision Vote: Nicholas Hunt-Bull presented the following bylaw revisions:

Bylaws: **Proposed revisions are bolded for spring 2025 re: eliminating the secretary officer position.** *The current bylaws are italicized.*

V Administration *Current*

V.1... The Board will consist of four officers and no fewer than three and no more than five members-at-large. The officers are the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

Proposed: The Board will consist of three officers and no fewer than two and no more than four members-at-large. The officers are the president, vice president, and treasurer.

V.3 Executive Officers: *Current*

V.3.D The secretary will be responsible for the written records of the proceedings of elections, business meetings and the Board of Trustee meetings. The secretary will have responsibility for all non-financial records of the fellowship and will keep accurate minutes of all meetings of the congregation and Board. The secretary will maintain records of membership of the fellowship and the voting eligibility of the members.

Proposed: Delete V.3.D and revise and the Office assistant responsibilities to include above tasks.

VII Rules and Procedures: *Current*

VII.3 *Quorums*

VII.3.B Four Board members, including at least one officer, will constitute a quorum of the Board of Trustees meetings.

Proposed: Three Board members, including at least one officer, will constitute a quorum, for the Board for Trustees meetings.

VII.6 Elections and Conditions of Office: *Current*

VII.6.D At the annual election, after all nominations are made, recorded and announced, voting will occur by secret ballot. IF there are no nominations from the floor, and no position is contested, the secretary will cast one ballot and the slate of nominees by the Leadership Development Committee will be considered elected.

Proposed:the president or a co-chair will cast one ballot...

Rachelle Armstrong made the motion to accept the changes, seconded by David Spinner. Following discussion, a vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Nominations and Election of Officers:

Jerry Bates representing the Leadership Development Committee made the recommendation for Stacey Edwards, Vincine Fallacia and Michael Vaughan be nominated to the Board. Jerry called for a vote nominating the following officers:

Co-Chairs: Tana Hanley and Nicholas Hunt-Bull

Treasurer: Ursula Jones

Members at Large: Mark Preston, Stacey Edwards, Vincine Fallica and Michael Vaughan

Following discussion, a vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Nicholas thanked Jerry for his work recruiting new members for the board.

Thank you to Minster and Search Process:

Connie Shemo, Co-Chair, thanked the search committee, Kathy Sajor, David Spinner, Stacey Edwards, Suzannah Chatlos, and Connie Shemo. Also thanked Jason Murray and Kris Luttes for their assistance, UUA did not approve them as Committee members since they are employees, but they were very vital in completing the record. Also, Connie thanked everyone for their feedback from the survey. The Search committee has been working diligently with UUA to post the Congregational Record for the minister's job posting. The record was posted on Thursday, June 5th; no applications as of today but the Search committee will keep everyone updated.

One of the questions the Search Committee was asked in preparing the record is What is the trust level with a minister? We answered this question with a very high level of trust in Rev. Nicoline. How do you build trust? As a committee we answered this with Rev. Nicoline built trust consistently acting with integrity. Every decision has always shown a lot of integrity

Connie stated in the name of transparency Rev. Nicoline was contractual obligated to stay with the fellowship one year after sabbatical. The board voted, unanimously, to

release her from her contract. Connie stated the board accepted her resignation with great regret but also with understanding. Rev. Nicoline volunteered to convert some of her vacation and study leave time to sabbatical leave. This allows the fellowship to have funds available for the next minister. Connie thanked Rev. Nicoline for this offer to convert the vacation/study leave to sabbatical leave. Connie thanked Rev. Nicoline for spending time to help us with getting the record out.

Minister's Report:

Rev. Nicoline thanked Connie for her service of two terms on the Board.

Rev. Nicoline stated she was asked to prepare a report for this meeting.

With love in my heart, deep appreciation, and no small amount of sadness, I offer this final report to you, at what will be my last congregational meeting. Although I have had the privilege of serving as your minister for the past seven years, some of you will remember we actually met eight years ago, on a sunny weekend in May, when I made my first visit across the Canada-US border to meet you.

I remember being so excited to meet this community of strong lay leaders, known for your innovation, your willingness to roll up your sleeves, your enthusiastic embrace of families and children, and for your many justice initiatives. I remember also being intrigued by the clarity with which you described some of your challenges.

You knew that in order to partner well with a professional minister - something that had not always been easy in the past - you would need to lean into change. Also, after decades as an informally-run, family-style congregation, you wanted to put in place clearer systems and professional standards.

The Rev. Evin Carvill-Ziemer, your UUA Primary Contact, suggested you add two more challenges to your list. The first: to learn what it truly means to have a minister - not just on Sundays, but as a trusted ministry partner over time. Rev. Evin also urged us to reflect together about how authority is exercised here, in order to better be able to answer the all-important question: "who decides?"

So much has happened since then.

You have become expert at offering high-quality, dual-platform worship services with spiritual practice at their heart. Your trademark "wave goodbye" at the end of each service sums up how you value and promote the belonging and relationships with all who attend - both in person and online. In my experience, there are few congregations who have figured out how to do this as well as you do.

You turned the main floor of your building into a fully accessible space, with a parking pad - wow!

Your "meeting culture" is rich and nourishing. You begin with a check-in, an invitation to bring your whole selves into the room. You depart with a check-out, an important

chance to name things that might otherwise have remained unsaid. And you've become skilled at the art of "rounds" - a practice that draws on group wisdom to move people with diverse viewpoints in the direction of better decision-making.

If you've been part of the Worship Team, you'll know that services are now developed collaboratively - and that most of us find that being a team of co-creators is deeply satisfying and fun!

And thanks to Kris Lutters, Jo El Miano, the RE staff and volunteers plus the Connect in Community team (who organize the fabulous connection-building Sundays for folks of all ages once a month), this space is now buzzing with the voices and energy of children and families once again.

You have made significant headway toward your goal of clarifying systems and meeting professional standards. You take your responsibilities as an employer seriously. As your staff team has grown, you've systematized practices like making sure job descriptions are up-to-date, compensation is reviewed annually, minister and staff both receive and offer regular feedback, and state safety requirements are met. To me, these are not extras: they mean you are an organization that takes integrity, and accountability, seriously.

Huge thanks are due to Dorothy Latta, your one-person HR team, and to Lisa Bulriss, whose comprehensive master calendar keeps all of us (me, the board, and staff) on track and able to address our many recurring tasks and deadlines.

Although your operating expenses have more than doubled over the past eight years, astonishingly, your financial contributions have doubled as well. You are a deeply generous people.

Like many over these last years, you have been invited to do the deep and difficult work of exploring how systemic oppression and othering have shaped your organizational culture. Some of the people of color among you have generously shared from their lived experiences, lifting up times when you did not live up to your values, leading to experiences of racism here at the congregation.

But, drawing on the commitment you made when you voted to uphold the UU 8th principle, and in partnership with the SUNY Plattsburgh DEI office, you have begun exploring areas for change. You made the brave decision, still uncomfortable for some, to replace the Sunday open mic with other practices - both on Sundays and throughout the week - to reduce the chances of harm.

And, now that some of you have become trained facilitators, I hope you will follow through with offering Truth, Healing, and Racial Transformation circles in the coming year.

What will I remember especially?

Times when we got to linger outside, especially when we first emerged from pandemic isolation. Remember Breakfast for Dinner at the Beach? Or Water Communion outdoors on Palmer Street, where together we shared blessings and greetings with a random collection of neighbors and dog-walkers? And our long-ago leadership retreat at Twin Valleys? I thank you for these times of fun and celebration.

I'll also remember the many small group conversations, like Starting Point, What Matters Now?, Think Tank, the Facilitators' Group, Sacred Words, and On Repentance and Repair. Many of those conversations continued one-on-one with me when your lives became difficult, as life inevitably does. I thank you for your trust.

I won't forget the privilege of getting to witness the wisdom and maturity of your amazing youth when I co-facilitated the HAWK sexuality education program.

I won't forget the honor of being able to represent you and our beloved faith tradition at community events like MLK Day, Pride, and the SUNY Plattsburgh Day of Racial Healing.

I won't forget the fabulous installation ceremony you organized at Temple Beth Israel, with UU colleagues, visiting dignitaries, live music, crafts, and the fabulous post-installation feast you put together. I thank you for your willingness to take the risk of entering into a longer-term partnership.

On a sadder note, as always happens, there were a number of elders from this community who died during my tenure. Like you, I think of them still.

I'm also grateful that being part of a religious community like this one offers us all the opportunity to accompany, celebrate, remember, and carry forth the legacy of people we have loved who are no longer physically among us. I thank you for the honor of having been able to accompany you through times of transition and loss.

One note on sacred objects. One of the unwritten rules of ministry is to never give the congregation gifts some among you will feel obligated to hang onto forever. I broke this rule when I gave you a small ceramic chalice, which you're now displaying on the chancel table, despite my intention that it be used only occasionally, at meetings. So please, please do not turn this into a sacred object, and allow its purpose to be transformed when the time is right!

There is one object I do hope you will keep sacred, however. Some of you will have recently heard that one member of this community is in a relationship - dare I say a sacred relationship -with the rocking chair that we brought up to the sanctuary a couple of years back. I charge you to keep this chair in its special spot, for any and all who feel the need to be rocked during their time among you!

I want to close by thanking everyone who has served on the Committee on Ministry, all the board members who have offered their service from 2017 to now, every staff member (virtual and in-person), the dedicated Commissioned Lay Ministers, past and

present, and all of you who have trusted me to enter your congregational system, to enter your lives, and to serve as minister. I have not been able to name everyone. Please know that our connections have been precious.

Have we figured out all the ways to answer, "Who decides?" I'm not sure.

Have you learned what it is to have a minister? I think the answer might be "Yes."

Speaking for myself, I certainly know I have learned, and will never forget, what an honor it has been to be your minister. My heart and my life will remain forever transformed by the relationships we have built over these past years. I thank you for the many gifts - too many to fully name - of this rich and unforgettable time together.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Nicoline Guerrier

The Refugee Project: Ursula Jones reported that:

The Fellowship's team (Plattsburgh Refugee Organization) became a certified sponsorship team through Welcome Corp in June 2024 and applied to sponsor a family of four with children without stating a preference for country of origin or language spoken. We were matched with two families; one from Somalia and one from Afghanistan whose travel arrangements were not completed. This program was defunded by Executive Order in Jan 2025. The team next applied to sponsor a family with Welcome NST, another resettlement agency not dependent on federal funding. We were matched with a family of three from Ecuador; Jose, Emily and their son Rodmar who arrived on 3/11/25. Initially they were housed in Airbnb's paid for by Welcome NST, then in a private home of a Fellowship member. Within a month a suitable two-bedroom apartment was found on Elizabeth St in Plattsburgh, the lease was signed, and they moved in. Jose and Emily interviewed for jobs, were hired and began commuting to Mold Rite Plastics with donated bicycles. Rodmar was registered for school and began attending kindergarten at Momot Elementary School. Along the way they applied, were approved for Medicaid, and admitted as patients to Hudson Headwaters. They now have bank accounts and have been taking care of all their bills independently.

Last week Jose was let go from his job without explanation but possibly related to having been injured on the job. He followed up on a job lead, began a trial work period, and it now appears that he will be offered a full-time position. Such is the employment ups and downs in today's job market. They enrolled in ESL classes and are studying on their own hoping to obtain learner's permits. They have been using language app on an iPad purchased by a team member to speed their English language acquisition.

Jose, Emily, and Rodmar have applied for political asylum and have a hearing scheduled for November 2025. They are looking for legal representation and saving money for the related costs. The team plans to provide transportation for grocery shopping and medical appointments over the summer, as well as giving guidance and assistance when asked.

It has been a very positive experience for those of us on the team and Jose and Emily have expressed gratitude and thanks for the help given and for living here.

Team members include Arlene Morrissey, Kris Lutters, Lori Neuhaus, Rita Fitzgerald, Connie Shemo, Shera Marston, Erin Cass, Megan Morrissey, Elaine Ostry, and Ursula Jones. We have been linking, advocating, transporting, raising money, and providing hospitality. Working together and with the support of the Fellowship, the primary tasks of resettlement have mostly been accomplished within the 90-day commitment window of the program.

Thank you for your support.

Ursula Jones, Team Coordinator

Closing Words: As an addendum to the Minister's Report Rev. Nicoline stated she would be remissed without thanking the Commissioned Lay Ministers Dorothy Latta, Nancy Lewin and Diana Wardell for a short period, who have been an integral part of the team supporting me and the fellowship while I have been here. Thank you.

Rev. Nicoline closing words by Mark Belletini:

Go In peace. Live simply, gently at home in yourself.

Act justly, speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Quest for peace and justice for all people in the world, beginning with yourselves, and go as you go with that dream of peace, love and justice alive in your hearts.

Blessed be.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:15pm.