



Annual Report

2024-2025

Meeting the
Moment

Agenda

166th Annual Meeting of the Members First Universalist Church of Minneapolis Sunday, June 8, 2025, 11:30 a.m.

Call to Order

Chalice Lighting and Opening Words

Appointment of Parliamentarian

Authorization of Board of Trustees to Approve the Minutes of this Meeting

Senior Minister's Report

President's Report

Financial Report & Presentation of Recommended Budget for 2025-2026

Consideration and Vote on Annual Budget

Report of the Nominating Committee

Election of:

Trustees, First Universalist Church

Officers, First Universalist Church

Directors, First Universalist Foundation

Members, Nominating Committee

Delegates, to the 2025 UUA General Assembly

Special Recognition:

Outgoing Board of Trustees Members

Outgoing Foundation Directors

Approval of proposed Revisions to First Universalist Bylaws

Motion to allow Board to appoint delegates to General Assembly

Closing Words

Adjourn

2024-2025 Board of Trustees

Jeff Snyder, *President*

Sarah Hedge, *Vice President*

Marc Gorelick, *Treasurer*

Matt Keller, *Secretary*

Cathy Geist

Emily Bijnagte

Ilo Leppik

Lou Quast

Emily Wallace

Ministers & Staff

Aimee K. Bryant, *Artist in Residence*

Allison Connelly-Vetter, *Director of Children, Youth, & Family Ministry*

Rev. Jen Crow, *Senior Minister*

Olu Famule, *Livestream Tech*

Rev. Ashley Harness, *Assistant Minister*

Hirut Hedge, *Children, Youth, & Families Program Specialist*

Jim Poulter, *Facilities & Events Manager*

Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout, *Director of Worship Arts Ministries*

Rachel Rott, *Communications Assistant*

Brad Schmidt, *Finance Manager*

Rev. Laura Smidzik, *Contract Minister*

John Steitz, *Sound Engineer*

Richard Thomas, *Custodian*

Claire Tralle, *OWL Program Coordinator*

Tracy Van Epps, *Facilities Manager*

Jie Wronski-Riley, *Bookkeeper*

Contents

ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA	1
SENIOR MINISTER'S REPORT	2-3
STEWARDSHIP TEAM REPORT	3
PRESIDENT'S REPORT	4-5
TREASURER'S REPORT	6-7
PROPOSED BUDGET	8
FOUNDATION REPORT	9
LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES	10-12



SENIOR MINISTER'S REPORT

Rev. Jen Crow

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In a time when so much is being destroyed, the role of the church will be to hold the center, to name what is and will always be true: that each and every person and being is whole and holy and worthy, welcome and wanted, all with room to grow.

”

Our faith names each and every person and being as whole and holy and worthy, welcome and wanted exactly as we are, and all with room to grow. The spirit of love and hope animates our congregation and our lives, and we commit to practicing Beloved Community within and beyond the walls of this church. Grounded in the experience of an all-embracing, all-inclusive, ever-expanding love, we cannot help but be transformed individually and collectively, creating a world here and now that demands the mutual thriving of us all. When we practice Beloved Community, we all share what we have so we can all have what we need. This is who we are. This is what we do. This is the work of the church.

While the love at the center of our faith has remained steady, the circumstances in our country and our world have challenged us—and our faith—in new ways this year. We are a long way from a here and now where we are meeting the demand of mutual thriving, grounded in an all-inclusive love. I am beyond grateful that we are able to meet this moment with a clear mission grounded in the Universalist spirit of love and hope, and a shared vision of Beloved Community that we can practice.

This church year, we dug deep in learning with the Intercultural Development Inventory, learning more about who and how we are, so that we might be able to show up more fully to authentic cross-cultural (which are all) relationships. We learned that as a group, we are in the developmental phase of *minimization*. Groups in minimization are turning toward greater intercultural competence and tend to emphasize similarities while de-emphasizing differences.

The primary spiritual work of individuals and groups in minimization is to learn about their own culture—eventually being able to identify “how we do things around here” (culture) so that these ways of being can be identified, talked about, negotiated, and re-created in ways that make for mutual thriving together.

Strengthening shared ministry has been a central focus this year. We are holding it together—whether what we are holding is grief or joy or the weight of resisting policies that deny the inherent worth and dignity of every person and all life. Our new website allows people to find us, and allows all of us to find out what is happening, and how to get involved. Breathing and praying and singing together on Sundays helps us to remember our interconnection, grow in relationship, and strengthen our individual and collective voices. In our ministry with Children, Youth, and Families we nurtured shared leadership in the classroom, in the creation of new curriculum, in the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Team and the Youth Leadership Team. We celebrated Allison Connelly-Vetter’s move to a more permanent position as Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries, grateful for the spirit of collaboration and empowerment she fosters among all ages.

Our ministry of Sanctuary and Resistance, centered now on creating spaces of refuge for our transgender and non-binary and immigrant siblings, has come alive again in new and powerful ways.

(Continued)

SENIOR MINISTER'S REPORT, CONTINUED

We've focused on accompanying individuals and families at risk, while also growing our capacity as a congregation to be a space of refuge for trans and non-binary people within the congregation and the broader Twin Cities community. We continue to learn with each other how to widen the circle of love, and live into our legacy as sanctuary people.

With new visionary goals in place and solid financial footing beneath us, thanks to the Stewardship Team and the Finance Committee and all of you, the Board of Trustees has been able to focus its attention on creating the conditions for the fulfillment of the church's mission and congregational health and vitality. Grateful for the support of the UUA and Rev. David Pyle, our Congregational Lead from the MidAmerica Region, the shared leadership of your Board and ministers have accessed resources, consultation, and care as we've navigated through security concerns, the new political realities of this time, and Rev. Arif Mamdani's leave of absence and departure.

As we pause for a deep breath and some time of reflection this summer, I can't help but begin to look ahead, too. This next church year will call us to listen to each other in new ways, building authentic relationships across differences with a deep commitment to creating safety for and with each other. In a time when so much is being destroyed, the role of the church will be to hold the center, to name what is and will always be true: that each and every person and being is whole and holy and worthy, welcome and wanted, all with room to grow. We are called to create a world here and now that allows all of us to thrive. We must remember the power we have and use it, wrestling joy out of this time, creating real relationships with our actual neighbors, and building spiritual resilience for the long haul. I know that, together, we will find and make our way grounded in the Universalist spirit of love and hope, practicing Beloved Community and all it can create. I'm so glad to be in this together with you.

STEWARDSHIP TEAM REPORT

The 2024-25 church year saw a lot of action from the Stewardship Team, between Give to the Max, our work on connecting with folks about their financial commitment to the church, and our concert "We the People" on May 4th. We are so grateful for the support of anyone who took part in these events, and made them a success, both as a way to fund the church and build community together. Stewardship of our beloved community requires ALL of US. As we look to the 2025-2026 church year, the Stewardship Team asks that you consider how you can be part of a beloved community and give of your time, talent, or money.



Promo graphic from the "We the People" fundraising concert, hosted and organized by the Stewardship Team



BOARD PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Jeff Snyder

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As Unitarian Universalists, we are called to be both responsive to the present moment and visionary about the future. Our strength lies not in our building or bank accounts, but in the relationships we cultivate and commitments we make to our shared values.

”

As we gather for our annual meeting, I am reflecting on the theme for UUA General Assembly, "Meeting the Moment," which invites us to consider: What is the moment we're in? What is needed from us as Unitarian Universalists in this moment? What do we need to meet this moment effectively? Here are my thoughts on a few of the ways we "Met the Moment" this year.

Ministerial Transitions and Resilience

This year brought significant transitions in our ministerial leadership. In December, Rev. Arif took a leave of absence, with Rev. Laura Smidzik joining us during his absence as a part-time contract minister focusing on pastoral care. In April, Rev. Arif made the difficult decision to conclude his ministry with us. The Board is grateful for his self-awareness and care for both himself and the congregation in making this decision and for Rev. Laura's continued support for our pastoral care ministry through this transition.

On the staff front, we dropped "Interim" from Allison Connelly-Vetter's title as she became Director of Children, Youth, & Family Ministries, and welcomed Liz Farmer as she transitioned from staff to an "in the pews" member of our congregation. We are also excited to welcome Nico Van Ostrand as our ministerial intern this fall, supported by the Cummins Internship Fund.

Financial Health and Shared Ministry

Through the dedicated work of our Finance Committee and Stewardship Team, we moved from projecting a significant deficit to achieving a balanced budget.

Your generosity allowed us to exceed our pledge goal of \$1.3 million—a remarkable achievement in challenging economic times that speaks to your commitment to our shared ministry. Under Board Treasurer Marc Gorelick's guidance, we maintained financial stability and implemented more transparent budget development processes, including listening sessions for congregant input.

Living Our Values Through Action

Our commitment to justice and compassion manifested in tangible ways:

Environmental Justice: We shifted Foundation investments toward environmentally responsible funds that better align with our values. Our Environmental Justice Team led climate conversations that will help guide our future climate actions.

Sanctuary & Resistance: We expanded the work of this team to hold trans refuge, immigrant justice, and reproductive justice. We formalized our partnership with Pink Haven Coalition, supporting trans and gender-expansive individuals relocating to safer states, welcoming our first family in January. Our sanctuary apartment continues to be used by families needing temporary housing.

Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity: Our partnership with Habitat continued during the past church year, with multiple Habitat builds, and [housing advocacy at the Minnesota State Capitol](#).

Community Building: We maintained monthly Community Dinners, welcomed new members, and continued meaningful worship services that honored the full range of human experience.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT, CONTINUED

Cultural Work and Governance

The Board and congregation engaged deeply with Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) work, examining our perspectives and improving how we serve the congregation. These challenging but valuable conversations strengthened our capacity to build authentic relationships across differences. We also clarified conflict of interest policies and are proposing changes to our Bylaws allowing more flexibility in board service—technical changes representing our commitment to transparent, effective governance.

Looking Forward

While celebrating these accomplishments, we recognize ongoing work ahead:

- Developing a comprehensive congregational health initiative
- Deepening our practice of shared ministry throughout the congregation
- Looking further into the “four pivots” framework shared by Dr. Elías Ortega in this spring’s workshop

An Invitation

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called to be both responsive to the present moment and visionary about the future. Our strength lies not in our building or bank accounts, but in the relationships we cultivate and commitments we make to our shared values.

In the spirit of "Meeting the Moment," I invite each of you to consider what this time calls for from us individually and collectively. How might you contribute your unique gifts to our shared ministry?

As I complete my term as Board President, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve and hope for our journey ahead. Together, we will continue creating a community where love is the guiding principle and justice the ongoing goal.



A graphic celebrating that we met our pledge goal at First U, enabling us to fund our ministries and our community care together for another year.



The outdoor letterboard at First U, with a message reading “TRANS KIDS ARE LOVED HERE.”



Photo from Dr. Elías Ortega’s workshop with church leaders; Dr. Ortega is pictured on the far left.

TREASURER'S REPORT



Marc Gorelick

It has once again been an honor to serve as treasurer and Board member for First Universalist Church this past year. I want to start with appreciation for the members of the Finance Committee for their terrific work: Dan Berg, Julie Most, Dick Niemiec, and Cameron Smither, as well as Will Hegeman and Tom Saterstrom, who served as liaisons from the Stewardship Team.

Finance Committee. The committee meets monthly to review the financial status of the church with Rev. Jen and Brad Schmidt, our finance manager. (For those interested, meeting minutes and monthly financial information are included in the board meeting packets, which are available on the church website.) We also worked collaboratively with Rev. Jen and Brad to draft the proposed budget for the coming fiscal year.

One highlight for the year was our revision of the investment allocation. We have instructed our investment manager to place all of our equity investments into advanced ESG (environmental, social, governance) funds in the categories where such funds are available. These funds screen out companies whose activities are at odds with our UU values. Among the sectors excluded are:

- Fossil fuels
- Nuclear power
- GMOs
- For-profit prisons
- Predatory lending
- Civilian firearms
- Conventional and nuclear weapons
- Gambling
- Alcohol and tobacco

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Our operating budget is a tangible expression of our values, our vision, and our mission. How we spend our money is one of the most important tools we have as we strive to align our institutional practices, our resources, and our outcomes with our visionary goals.

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2024-25 Fiscal Year performance. The current fiscal year operating and capital budget anticipated total revenue of \$1,791,000, with 93% of that coming from current or past congregational giving, and no deficit.

Over the course of the year, pledge income was very close to budget, while other giving and fundraising actually exceeded our expectations, and earned income was slightly below. As a result, we are projecting to end the year with nearly \$35,000 in revenue above what was budgeted, or 2% ahead. Conversely, several categories of expenses were running over what was budgeted. The key drivers were:

- Higher than expected costs for childcare due to a regulatory change in minimum wage
- Higher than expected health insurance costs
- Need for building security in response to several threats received
- Temporary part-time ministerial support during Rev. Arif Mamdani's leave of absence
- Some higher software and other licensing fees.

The net effect was to create a projected deficit for the year, which we first noted in the second quarter. In response, we instituted several expense reductions, which, in combination with the strong fundraising, allowed us to significantly reduce the size of the projected deficit from almost \$50,000 (February projection) to just over \$5,000. On the positive side, we finally received some COVID-related funds we had been expecting from the IRS, totaling \$117,000. Although the amount received was less than we had originally hoped, it has allowed us to restore some funds to our operating reserve, which has been significantly depleted in recent years. (Continued)

TREASURER'S REPORT, CONTINUED

2025-26 Proposed Budget

Our operating budget is a tangible expression of our values, our vision, and our mission. How we spend our money is one of the most important tools we have as we strive to align our institutional practices, our resources, and our outcomes with our visionary goals. Responsible financial stewardship, caring for our congregation and our community, and progress toward our newly adopted visionary goals guide our planning. We also continue to analyze and review our current ministry and program offerings and what is needed for the present and the future of our church and Unitarian Universalism, and we are aiming to increase shared ministry and lay leadership at First Universalist.

Budget assumptions:

As we prepared our annual budget for 2025-26, our commitments were as follows:

- We will present a balanced budget, with realistic income and expense numbers based on past performance and planned fundraising efforts
- We will plan for inflation and expected cost increases
- We will keep staff salaries within UUA minimum salary recommendations
- Increase giving to the UUA annual fund as possible
- If staffing needs to be reduced, this will be done by eliminating whole positions rather than making across-the-board or piecemeal reductions.
- We will keep staff benefits aligned with recommendations by the UUA, without changes.

We also made a few changes to the budgeting process this year. We began the process, including setting a pledge goal, earlier in the year. We also added some opportunities for congregational input earlier in the process, holding budget listening sessions in April.

Information in this report is accurate as of 27 May – some information may be changed by the time of the annual meeting.

NOTE: As we have done for the past few years, we have included income from the Capital/Building Fund for allowable expenses (primarily construction loan payments) at \$155,000 per year. However, at the end of the 2025-26 fiscal year, only \$19,500 will remain in the Capital/Building Fund, so this source of revenue will be largely gone for the 2026-27 budget year.

Revenue Highlights

- Realistic, planned-for projections in fundraising and income (\$1,310,000 in annual giving)
- Total revenue approx. 2.8% less than projected for 2024-25

Expense Highlights

- Three percent cost of living increase or adjustment to meet UUA minimum salary guidelines for all staff, whichever is higher
- Elimination of one full-time position (membership coordinator), moving this ministry to lay led and staff supported
- Reduction of full-time Associate Minister position to half-time Assistant Minister position with focus on increasing lay leadership in pastoral ministry
- \$5000 in sabbatical fund
- Reduction of Racial Justice budget line to reflect typical usage, from \$10,000 to \$5,000
- Reduction of Childcare expenses to reflect shift to increased shared ministry in Religious Education, and encouragement of youth to be involved in the church in a variety of ways
- Five percent increase to UUA annual fund
- Addition of year-round security coverage for Sunday services
- Approximately \$3500 toward additional staffing needs outlined below, to be allocated by Rev. Crow
 - Five hr/week COA/Youth staff
 - Accompanist
 - 10 hrs/week administrative support



Proposed Operating Budget, 2025-2026

	2025-26 Proposed Budget
Revenues	
Support	
Annual Giving	\$1,275,550
Donations/Fundraising	\$236,500
Building/Capital Fund	\$155,500
Revenue Released from Restriction	\$0
Total Support	\$1,667,550
Earned Revenue	
Service/Rental Income	\$109,000
Investment Income	\$0
Other Income	\$2,000
Total Earned Revenue	\$111,000
Total Revenues	\$1,778,550
Expenses	
Personnel Expenses	\$1,238,000
Administrative Expenses	\$162,001
Program Expenses	\$82,000
Building & Grounds	\$162,800
Construction Loan	\$133,000
Other Expenses	\$500
Total Expenses	\$1,778,301
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	\$249

FOUNDATION REPORT



Isabel Quast, Chair

The First Universalist Foundation acts as a catalyst for social change by promoting and supporting the development of emerging leaders, youth, young adults, and marginalized communities through monetary grants to nonprofits working in those communities.

The First U Foundation was created in 1984 from an endowment fund resulting from the sale of Unity Settlement House, a neighborhood center owned by the predecessor to First Universalist Church, The Church of the Redeemer, since 1893.

The settlement house was purchased from the church and demolished when I-94 was built through north Minneapolis. The settlement house served immigrant and Indigenous families on the near north side of the city. The Foundation strives to carry on that legacy through grants from income on the endowment.

Historically, the First U Foundation has given out grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

Giving Priorities:

1. Demonstrate the potential to address one or more causes of forms of injustice.
2. Work to engage youth, young adults, and/or disenfranchised communities in the work of social change.
3. Have a commitment to measuring the impact or success of the funded program.
4. Focus on the Twin Cities community.
5. Organizations with annual budgets of less than \$1,000,000 will be given greater priority.

**With great pleasure, we
announce our 2025
grant recipients:**

Conversations with Friends
\$7,500

**Minnesota Interfaith Coalition on
Migration (ICOM):**
\$10,000

**Minnesota Valley Chapter of the
Izaak Walton League of America:**
\$10,000

Out in the Back Yard:
\$2,000

Prevail News:
\$10,000

**Raices Sagradas Community
Mental Health:**
\$13,000

Sisters' Camelot:
\$10,000

Voices of Hope:
\$7,500

TOTAL GRANTED: \$70,000
Nominations Submitted: 21



RECOMMENDATIONS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

FOUNDATION BOARD



Ginny Belden-Charles returned to First U in 2022 to be in a church community with her daughter, son-in-law and grandsons. She facilitates the Newcomer's Circles and loves the way this program helps newcomer's get connected within the church community. Ginny's career was in organization and leadership development. She facilitated strategic change and leadership development within non-profit organizations and directed cross-sector social change initiatives in MN. Recently retired, Ginny now has time to sing in the choir and to develop Act Together for Democracy, a group that helps people find ways to collectively contribute to political and social change.



Arthur "Stuart" Hanson and his wife, Gail, joined First Universalist in 1970. They both served on the board of trustees during the next decade as their children participated in the religious education programs. They taught the first human sexuality course for adolescents published by Beacon Press. Arthur practiced pulmonary medicine at Park Nicollet Clinic for 41 years. He has held leadership positions at Park Nicollet, and in Minnesota and national medical societies that include board memberships and officer roles both with for profit and nonprofit organizations. Arthur is honored to be asked to run for the First Universalist Foundation Board.



Amanda Kaler has been part of the First Universalist community since 2016, volunteering as a greeter, Soul Matters facilitator, and participant in racial justice workshops. After a pandemic pause, she and her husband are grateful to be back with their six-year-old daughter, Lydia. Amanda has spent her career in the nonprofit sector, from running a free restaurant through an Oregon food bank to her current role as Advancement Director at Springboard for the Arts, a nonprofit helping artists make a living and a life. She brings over 12 years of fundraising experience to the board, along with a deep commitment to mission-driven, equity focused work.



Polly Munts Talen, a lifelong UU, joined First Universalist in the late 80's. Polly's leadership at the church includes a much earlier stint on the Foundation Board and the Welcoming Congregation Task Force, and more recently as founding member of the Racial Justice Leadership and Racial Justice Education teams. Polly started out professionally running a small nonprofit serving urban girls. She then worked for 30 years in private philanthropy as a grant maker. Outside church, Polly facilitates anti-racism programs for alums at her alma mater, Wellesley, as well as serving as a class officer. She recently joined the college's Nominating Committee after being inducted into Wellesley's Athletic Hall of Fame for rowing.

from the

RECOMMENDATIONS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES | OFFICERS



Nominee for President: Marc Gorelick

Marc became a UU in the early 1990s, and started coming to First Universalist shortly after moving to Minneapolis in 2017. He is particularly drawn to First U's focus on anti-racism and racial justice. At his previous churches, he has taught RE, served on ministerial search, bylaws, and auction committees as well as the Board of Trustees including two terms as President. A pediatric emergency medicine physician by training, he is currently chief executive officer of Children's Minnesota, with plans to retire later in 2025. He also serves on the boards of Playworks MN and Minnesota Public Radio. Marc enjoys running, cycling, homebrewing, and playing tuba in the Minnesota Freedom Band.



Nominee for Secretary: Matt Keller

Matt has been attending First U since 2009. He lives in South Minneapolis, and his career is in education, publishing, and technology. Two of his children attended RE at First U, where he also taught class for several years. Matt has been involved in strategic planning and pastoral care at church and is currently in his fourth year as Secretary on the Board of Trustees. For fun, Matt plays trombone in three bands, bikes, hikes, and travels.



Nominee for Treasurer: Cameron Smither

Cameron joined First Universalist in March of 2024 after moving to Minneapolis in mid-2023, but no place has felt more like home. After spending a dozen plus years in transient-heavy Washington DC, he was ready for a more thoughtful and grounded approach to community and First U has been that gift! His two-year First U anniversary "Rocky training montage" would include lots of discord messaging with other young adults, shyly singing for the first time in the choir, giving ad hoc presentations with senior high youth, quilting extremely slowly with the quilting group, tracking waterfall charts with the finance committee, and much much more. When not working, Cameron likes to bike, play games, and cook in the First U kitchen.



Nominee for Vice President: Emily Wallace

Emily became a member at First Universalist in 2018, and was particularly drawn to it because of its commitment to racial and environmental justice. She knew she had found a spiritual home when she cried the first time she attended a Sunday service. She helped co-facilitate racial justice workshops as well as the Newcomer Circle. Emily has served on the Board since 2023, supports families with children through Saturday Sprouts, and is co-chair on the Stewardship Team. In her spare time, she likes to bake, take walks in nature, and read. Her daughters, Vivian and Corinne, also attend church with her, and she is so glad to have such a loving and supportive church community helping her navigate the joys and challenges of life and parenting.

RECOMMENDATIONS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES | MEMBERS



Nominee for Trustee: Katherine Harrell

Katherine has attended First Universalist since 2017. She was drawn to the church because of the depth of conversation First U holds as a faith community for discerning what possibilities emerge for a reimagined world when our time, talents, and treasures are collected and refined with questions of heart. In these heartbreaking times, Katherine sees faith communities as uniquely positioned to heal the traumas of injustice, question and challenge oppressors, and offer a path for liberation. Katherine has served as a worship associate, taught Religious Education, served on ministerial search committees, Rev. Arif's Committee on Ministry, and organized volunteers for supporting a church-sponsored asylum seeker. Katherine has training in deep listening traditions including Buddhist eco-chaplaincy and Marriage and Family Therapy.



Nominee for Trustee: Drew Rosielle

Drew Rosielle has been attending First Universalist since late 2014. He started attending with his spouse, Sarah, and his then two elementary school-aged children (Benjamin & Max). While he started coming for his kids, he stayed for himself, as he realized how much he needed to be in community, especially one which was trying to create beloved community, however imperfectly and humanly. He's been involved in the church through leading circles, intermittently with the church's Sanctuary & Resistance work, and has co-facilitated 8th grade OWL the last couple of years. Outside of church, Drew is a palliative care physician, and enjoys cycling/bike commuting, science fiction, and cooking.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE



Chad Johnson

Chad has been attending First Universalist Church since 2018 when he knew he'd found his spiritual home before even finding his seat in the pews. Since then he's found community on Sundays and through consistent engagement in small groups and circles. You'll see him attending Sundays with his long time friend Courtney. Chad is a process analyst at Boston Scientific where he supports global supply chain systems delivering medical devices to patients in more than 40 countries. An undergraduate history and religious studies major, Chad continues to seek deeper understanding of our collective story and how it continues to shape the present. He lives in the Kingfield neighborhood of South Minneapolis with his partner Bradley (BJ) and their goofy and lovable dog Daphne.