

# - the Beacon -

## The UUCGT Newsletter

Soul Matters Theme: "Renewal"

Date Service Creators Title / Description



**Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation of  
Grand Traverse (UUCGT)**

6726 Center Road,  
Traverse City, MI, 49686 –1802  
231-947-3117

[office@uucgt.org](mailto:office@uucgt.org) / [www.uucgt.org](http://www.uucgt.org)

**UUCGT Office is OPEN**  
Monday-Thurs. 10:00-4:00

**Senior Minister**

Rev. Alex Jensen  
a.jensen@uucgt.org

**Community Minister**

Rev. Dr. Wendy von Courter  
revwendyvong@gmail.com

**Director of Music**

Ann Marie Jones  
music@uucgt.org

**Director of Religious Education**

Chelsea Bentley  
dre@uucgt.org

**Office Administrator**

We are hiring!

**Technical Director**

Geoff Norman-Anderson  
geoff.normananderson@gmail.com

Jun 2, 2024	Rev. Alex Jensen Coordinator: Misty Sheehan	<b>"The Flower Communion: Living Pride"</b>
----------------	--	---

As we mark one of Unitarian Universalism's special ceremonies, what is the message of the flowers? What can the flowers teach us about living out loud and proud in our lives?

Jun 9, 2024	<b>Lay-Led Service</b> Coordinators: Dave Newhouse and Dan Tholen	<b>"Religious Practice vs. Natural Laws"</b>
----------------	--	--

When the interpretation of Scripture conflicts with what we can observe in Nature, the interpretation needs to be renewed. This has occurred in many significant areas, but still has more to go; let Nature show us the divine plan for renewal.

Jun 16, 2024	Rev. Alex Jensen Coordinator: Beth Strawbridge	<b>"The Question Jar! Drag Edition"</b>
-----------------	--	---

Join us for this special Sunday in Pride Month for a special service on the art of drag. What's the meaning of life? What is prayer, really? What about your favorite color? Ask Rev. Alex and our guest Drag Queen Deija Vatou a question on your mind and heart.

Jun 23, 2024	Rev. Dr. Wendy von Courter Coordinator: Susan Smith	<b>"Why?"</b>
-----------------	---	---------------

Why? In a time when fewer people are joining faith communities some wonder "Is the church dying?" Come join our Community Minister for Social Justice Rev. Dr. Wendy von Courter as she engages the question and makes the case for church!

### Please note:



Beacon submissions are welcomed and due by the end of the day on the 23rd of each month. Thank you for making the Beacon a great way to communicate with our beloved community. **Please send submissions to Editor Amanda Mangiardi: [jomangiardi@hotmail.com](mailto:jomangiardi@hotmail.com)**

2023 -2024	
Dan Tholen	President
Richard Miller	Vice President
Amanda Mangiardi	Secretary
Dusty Culton	Treasurer
Misty Sheehan	Trustee
Judy Myers	Trustee
Chris Walter	Trustee



# UUCGT Senior Minister's Annual Report — June 2, 2024

I hold office hours by appointment, in addition to open Community Coffee Hours every so often. I am intentionally away from email on Mondays for Sabbath and rest, as well as on Fridays for writing and study.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

from REV. ALEX

What a great year we've had! As a congregation, I've been impressed by our accomplishments this year. The ways each of you show up and give of yourselves in service to our community shows just how much this place means to you and to each one of us.

This year held some dynamic and challenging services: our services highlighting the Day of the Dead, an Artificial Intelligence exploration with the Universalist Hosea Ballou, a UU Communion service, as well as a service on the importance of resisting fascism through the lens of My Little Pony! (You go with me in some interesting directions!) We've had services that center underrepresented stories from our history, from LGBTQ+, women, and Black Universalists and Unitarians. This year, we also commemorated our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our congregation's founding to date; founded May 12, 1964. We unveiled some new and exciting statements from our Vision, Mission, and Covenant (VMC) Task Force. At this Meeting, we shall decide whether to affirm this new Mission and Covenant as our own!

With our Fall Fun(d)raiser, we raised upwards of \$16,000! That's even higher from last year's which surpassed \$10,000! We saw sustained giving and even some increases for our budget, totaling the most in pledges we've collected. Beyond the giving of treasure, this community has given much in the way of time and talent. In this third year as your Senior Minister, we've had 47 folks join us as new members, 20 in this year (not counting those who will join us this June), and all of the many new attendees who call themselves Friends. What is beautiful about this community is that we each participate in the life of our congregation. Friends and Members—new and old—show up and give our congregation its oomph!

Our Religious Education program has seen some renewed vitality, with a steady attendance of kids most Sundays. We've had families come for services and come back because their kids want to see their friends! For adults, our growing number of Soul Matters Small Groups has grown thanks to the strong work of our Facilitators. These Small Groups have been sites of transformation and belonging; participating in a group this year, I'm convinced that building up these groups is integral to our growth and continued health as a community. How else do we practice skills in deep listening and ongoing spiritual growth and model this for those curious of what Unitarian Universalism has to offer?

**"Grounded in Love  
We protect the Web of Life by:  
Building Beloved Community,  
Making Good Trouble,  
Embodying Radical Love, [and]  
Engaging in Lifelong Learning."**

As we draw this congregational year to a close, I invite you to sit with the words of our proposed Mission Statement: "Grounded in Love we protect the Web of Life by: Building Beloved Community, Making Good Trouble, Embodying Radical Love, [and] Engaging in Lifelong Learning". *Where do you see yourself in this Mission? How does it reflect your hopes for our congregation's future? What ministries are calling out to you in this time, beckoning you to help us live into this bold Mission?*

In the next year, should we approve this Mission and Covenant, we'll have some work to do. These statements are just mere words unless we choose to live by them. As a community, we'll need to tackle strategic planning in creating momentum in each of these four areas. We'll need to examine our budget to ensure that our finances reflect our commitments to these ministries. (Think: color-coded budget that shows how our money is spent in the service of our Mission.)

Continued next page

Likewise, we must internalize our Covenant and set up structures that help us in our accountability to each other, to ourselves, and to our faith. Each of us has a part in embracing this exciting future and direction for our community. Though, they are also just words. We must live by them for them to be true.

Dear Ones, completing this third year of our journey together has meant more to me than you know. I am a different, more confident (and competent!) Minister from the one you called back in 2021. Thank you for your deepening support of my ministry and of our shared ministry as a congregation.

From your Minister, with deep faith, love, and admiration,  
Rev. Alex Jensen, Senior Minister, UUCGT



## MEMBERS and FRIENDS

Changes in the online directory will be made monthly. However, we will no longer be posting specific information changes to the *Flash* and *Beacon* in order to keep our information secure.

To see specific changes you will need to go to the online directory at [uucgt.org](http://uucgt.org). There is a separate document on that same page that lists the changes.

To look at recent changes to the Directory, go to "About Us"  
Then go to "Members and Friends Only"  
(You will need the password to get into this section.)  
If you have not already done so, call the Office to get the password.  
Date on the current updated directory is 14 May 2024

### THIS IS US!



## New Grant Awarded to UUCGT

UUCGT has been awarded a Sacred Grounds grant, including 1000 native plants and expert advice on planning for and planting them on our grounds.

The importance of native plants cannot be underestimated as we face the loss of integral parts of our ecosystem.

This grant was awarded by the AuSable Institute of Environmental Studies, which partners with the National Wildlife Federation in Northern Michigan. The Sacred Grounds Program reaches out to houses of worship in their quest to build and restore the Earth.

Their rationale for designing and maintaining this program is their recognition that congregations are uniquely poised to address concerns related to bio-diversity and habitat loss by engaging members in native plant gardening for restoration practices.

Their stated purpose certainly mirrors our own as reflected in our Seventh Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Planting 1000 native plants will require commitment and participation by many. Watch for opportunities to prepare the land, plant the natives and celebrate together.

Ours will be a journey of education and mutual support as we design our beds and care for our horticultural haven.

Andi Kramer



## Coffee with Rev. Alex

# June Community Coffee Hours *with Rev. Alex!*

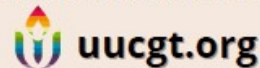
WED JUN 5, 2-3:30 PM

TH JUN 13, 4:30-6 PM

*All are welcome!  
Always a blast!*

Held at GT Pie Co (by Burritt's):  
525 W Front St.

*Community Coffee Hours will be  
on hiatus for July & August.  
We will resume again in September!*



**STUDY  
BREAK**

### Rev. Alex's Vacation and Study Leave

Rev. Alex will be away from his  
pastoral responsibilities from  
**Monday, June 17th through Monday, August 12th,**  
returning to the Office on **Tuesday, August 13th.**

**STUDY  
BREAK**

During this time, our Community Minister Rev. Dr. Wendy von Courter and the Congregational Care Team will be available for pastoral emergencies.

This is an important time of rest and rejuvenation for our Minister. If you have any questions, please reach out to Rev. Alex or the Committee on Ministry. And if you have a good book or two that you'd suggest for some summer reading, Rev. Alex would welcome your recommendations! :)



## Save the Date!

**Sunday, September 8th**



Rev. Alex and his fiancé Connor are to be married in late August in a private ceremony.

Mark your calendars for a special Coffee Hour Reception with Connor and Alex following our Water Communion. Join us for some cake and punch to celebrate their wedding!

## **Treasurer's Report – Dusty Culton**

- We continue to do well overall. Revenue is doing well. It will taper down for the next two months.
- We need to make sure we are ok for next year. We would like to carry over our excess of \$30,000.
- Music did spend money on copyrighting although going forward we need to make sure this is budgeted.
- Jim is stepping down from the committee and Rick Walter is taking over. He will be missed.
- All of the disputed quarters, about 9 of them, 2019-2021, have been resolved.

## **Update from Social Justice - grants awarded for “Good Trouble” activities and expenses**

- \$1000 from Interfaith America Faith in Election Grant
- \$500 from UU Funding Agency

## **Task Force for Signs**

- One side of our road sign has been cleaned up and the other side will be done soon and then it will be painted to make it more visible.
- A sign on the building is also in the future

## **The “TriPod Retreat” regarding the Ministry on May 11: Rev. Alex**

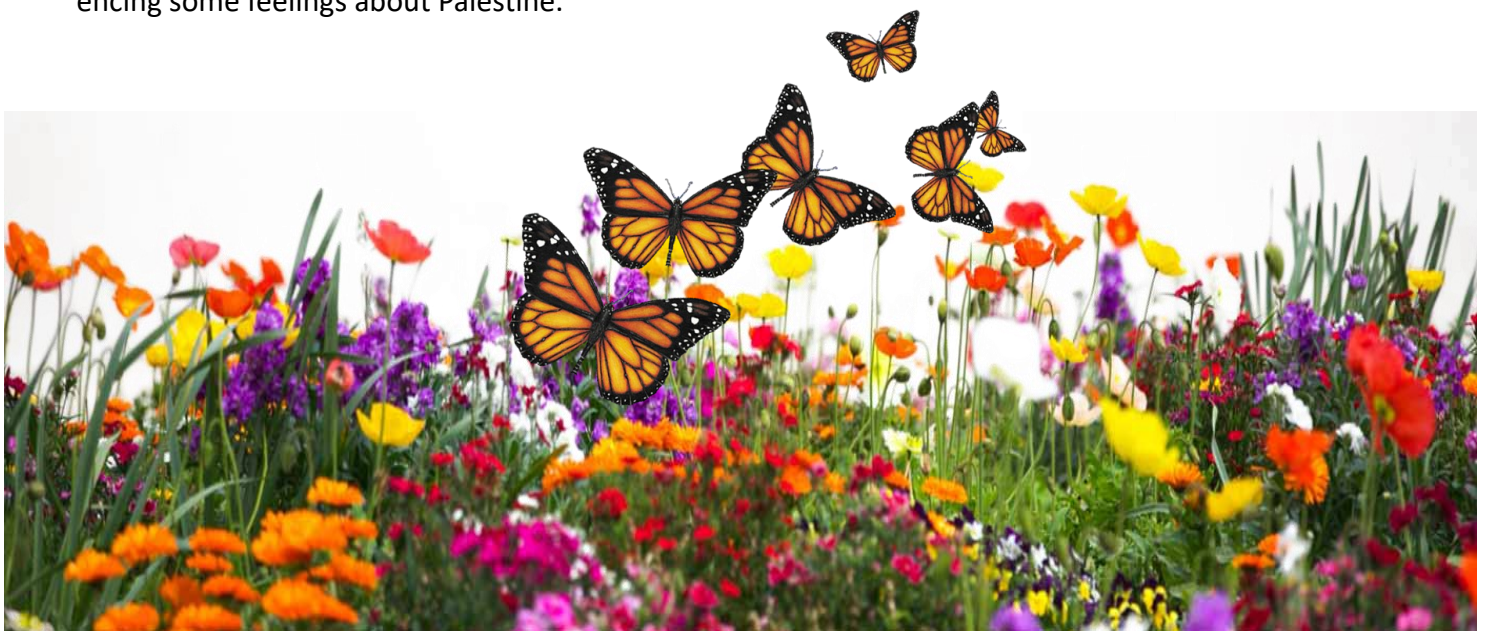
- The meeting was very productive and was great to get the whole leadership in the same room and have some conversations to move us forward.
- Thank you to Chris Walter for the use of her and Rick’s beautiful home.

## **Facilities report – Richard Miller**

- The roof needs to be addressed next and are gathering bids.
- Have refreshed the chips in the Williams Garden.

## **Minister’s Report – Reverend Alex**

- The Benzie has announced that they are going to pause their group. They have been around for 27 years and are struggling to get folks to contribute.
- Alex has created a new binder and wants to maintain a historical archive of items found during the deep cleaning and office organization.
- We don’t have a candidate for office administrator yet.
- Alex spoke to Rabbi Arnie who expressed that he and his congregants are feeling concerned and are experiencing some feelings about Palestine.





# FINANCIAL REPORT

## Financial Report Through April 2024

April 2024 YTD Income:	\$ 287, 215
April 2024 YTD Expenses:	\$ 216, 738
For Those in Need YTD	\$ 7,602

Overall we continue to do well maintaining a good level of revenue (118% of expected) vs expenditures. We should have plenty of funds to cover this year’s working budget expenses. Our pledge levels for the present fiscal year (2023-2024) are about 80% of expected but we continue to have very good revenue from the Building Use, Interest, and Fundraising. Our prepay for next fiscal year (2024-2025) is approaching \$100,000. Our General Operations Fund still lags only at 59% of expected. As expected, our expenses are creeping up a bit and represent 91% of predicted..

Given the very robust pre-pay response to this year’s Annual Budget Drive we need to carryover sufficient funds to support the Budget needs next year (2024-2025).

Our Cash Flow analysis shows us likely to have approximately \$30,000 carryover to help ensure we have appropriate funding next year.. Our major concern is the long term out of budget needs for our facilities and Ministerial sabbatical commitments. Judy Meyers and Charley Bellinger have kindly agreed to head up a Capital Improvement Fund Task Force that will take the lead in generating ideas and working with the Board, Finance Committee, Facility Team, and other appropriate committees to address the facility issues. Expect them to be knocking at some of your doors for members to be on the Task Force.

Of note: Our Annual Budget Drive is still alive and we now have 114 pledges for \$246,566 (98,6%) of our goal. Thank you once again for your generous participation this year. You can still make a pledge at any point.

The Budget for 2024-2025 was discussed in the previous Beacon Financial Report and in the Annual Meeting Budget Proposal information recently sent out to the congregation.

Thank you for your commitments and fellowship to our congregation.

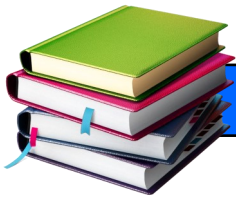
Dusty Culton, Treasurer.



## Celebrating 60 years for UUCGT!

UUCGT has been around for 60 years, and we want to acknowledge both our original founders Mary Ann Force and Janice Park, as well as our hope going forward, pictured here as baby Rev. Alex with his mother, Lucienne Jensen.

**Let’s keep this wonderful and beloved community going strong!**



## OUR UUCG LIBRARY

### UU Library: The Freebie Shelves

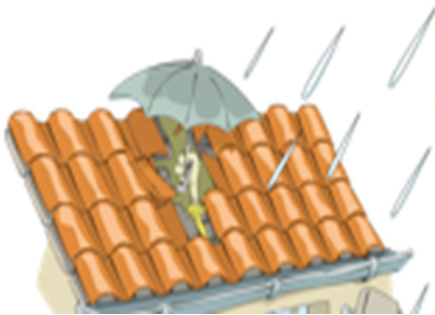
Have you noticed several shelves full of books in the area behind the name tag racks?

That is where the UU Library Committee places books that are culled from the shelves. The books are often duplicates of books we already have, or books that have occupied shelf space in the library for many years without ever being checked out, not even once. It would be great to keep all books in the library, but space is limited, so we occasionally liberate a book so that it can find a new home. They are free to any booklover who'd like to take one or several.

A really special offering right now on those Freebie shelves is a set of audio CDs by The Great Courses, all on Religions of the World. Please, help yourself to any that interest you, one or even the whole set!

Carol Ritter and Bonnie Mathias

---



### Your Help is Needed for a Capital Improvements/Renovation Team

In conversations with Facilities, the Board, and members of the Finance Committee, we would like to form a new **Capital Improvements/Renovation Team**.

Our main purpose will be raising funds to meet some of our aging building's needs. We need volunteers to serve on this new team. Our building is getting old and cranky and needs some major maintenance/improvements.

We would like to form a **Capital Renovation Fund** - which in no way competes with the Annual Budget Drive or Endowment Fund - to address some of these needs. The Facilities team has created a list of much needed upgrades, including, but not limited to; our rather shabby, tired looking parking lot, our periodically leaking roof, plumbing upgrades, lighting, new carpet, etc. etc. etc.

We are not looking for new eyes on these problems, but a few dedicated folks who know how to raise money to facilitate these needs. We are looking for creative, knowledgeable fundraisers with innovative thinking. We realize this is a long term goal, so we encourage forward thinking ideas.

We are in need of a major fund raising campaign to ensure our beautiful home of worship and grounds are maintained for the next generation. If you think you can help us with this important endeavor, please contact:

Judy Myers, [tcjlm@aol.com](mailto:tcjlm@aol.com), Charley Bellinger, [cbellinger88@yahoo.com](mailto:cbellinger88@yahoo.com) or Rick Walter, [rick9709@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rick9709@sbcglobal.net).

Thank you so much for considering this!

Judy Myers





## SOCIAL JUSTICE Action Team

From UtheVote.org - Prophetic Not Partisan:

“Progressive people of faith can be powerful and prophetic without being partisan. We can engage our neighbors, educate our communities, mobilize voters, rally around ballot initiatives, and shape the public discourse with values-based framing, rooted in our theology and principles.”

UUCGT has resolved to actively engage, as a congregation, in the 2024 elections with non-partisan actions. You may be wondering how you can do your part. Here’s a start:

- Visit the SJA table after Sunday services for informational and educational materials, bumper stickers and buttons, and opportunities to sign up for Good Trouble work....or just to enjoy some good conversation!
- Visit the Justice section of UUCGT.org to find a plethora of actions and activities just waiting for your participation.
- Pick up and distribute some of our “business cards” that can magically transport the holder to the UUCGT website.
- Talk with friends and neighbors, even strangers!, about how we all can help save our democracy by voting and urging others to vote. Hint: wearing one of our Vote your Values buttons can be a conversation starter, as can the Your Vote Your Future bumper sticker.

**Mark your calendar:** The June 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Service will be led by Rev. Dr. Wendy von Courter, our Community Minister for Social Justice. The June 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday Service is planned and will be facilitated by SJA members. Both services will emphasize our American Democracy. You WON’T want to miss them!

Jan Zerbel

## Congregational Care



### Active Care:

Ron Culp  
 Nancy Fraser  
 Nancy Landfair (Pavilions)  
 Ann Marie & Karl Love  
 Susan & Frank Smith

Paul Ward  
 Misty Sheehan

### Bereavement:

Leslie Chinn (Ann, mother, May 15, 2023)  
 Ron Culp (Karen, wife, January 31, 2024)  
 Nancy Fraser (Don, husband, October 31, 2023)  
 Claire Lepine (Martha, mother, December 6, 2023)  
 Karen Kozan Mclean (father, December 20, 2023)  
 Mary & Dave Newhouse (Tanner, grandson, March 9, 2024)  
 Amanda Mangiardi, Charley Bellinger (Marcia, mother, January 26, 2024)  
 Clif Thompson (Carolyn Thompson, May 10, 2024)

### Thinking Of You:

Barb & Dusty Culton  
 Kim Gribi  
 Lou & Joy Platteborze  
 Susan Pyne (Maples)

### People Who Are More Remote

Barb Bloomer (Bay Ridge)  
 Shari Cope (Cordia)  
 Gary Deavel (Cordia)  
 Ann Dressel (Cordia)  
 Agustín Gurule/Judy Maynard (Cordia)





## GAMBLE AWARD RECIPIENTS 2023



### Judy Myers

Judy has been a member of UUCGT since 2012. Her first contribution was time at Safe Harbor. She joined a Task Force to create the Safe Congregations Policy. Having been a consultant to various Housing Authorities around the country this seemed a good spot for Judy. She ended up doing the actual writing and the Policy Committee has been her main home since then.

Judy has served on Finance, Leadership Development, Safe Congregations and Social Justice. She also served 3 stints on the Board, 2 of them filling in for someone who was unable to finish their term, and 1 elected for a full term, which will end this June.

Judy claims that her greatest joy has been as a founding member of the UUUKers, with Mary Anne Rivers and Cindy Edmonson. The group now has other newer members. Other connections Judy has include friends in the Creative Writing class from a few years back. She also joined a Soul Matters group last year and found Soul Sisters there. She feels a very special connection to that group.

Judy is seen in many places: fundraising, grounds clean up, marching, etc. but her main focus is to try to assure us that our governance is strong and functional.

Judy lives on a small lake near Interlochen with a dog, cat, kayaks, gardens, golf clubs, and a small pop-up trailer for short get-aways. Friends often gather for Tomato Tasting or dinners on the deck.

Judy states “UUCGT has become my home and I am so grateful for the connections and relationships I have made here. As Richard spoke about in the service last week – it is our love for each other that makes us strong. Thank you so much for the honor of this Gamble Award.”



### Kim Gribi

Kim has been a member for more than 27 years. Here are some examples of the nature of her service.

If there is someone in need, Kim not only notices, but takes action. She is the model of how to be of service. One year when she worked at the resort, as winter began she soon realized the Jamaican employees were walking to work without winter coats and boots and mittens and hats. Next thing that happened, news went out to the congregation, and she collected and delivered the needed clothing to keep these guests warm and safe.

Hilarious memories of this Gamble Awardee come from her participation in the old April Fools Concerts. Other heartfelt memories come from her serious and beautiful performances on her violin.

Kim has helped within our congregation in many ways, and one that is so appreciated is her guidance on the Staff Resources Committee. She is our in house HR guru.

Continued next page



When the war in Ukraine started, Kim never lost her stride, she organized a huge garage sale for Ukraine which brought in over \$6,000 for Doctors without Borders for their work in the war zone.

Every year for a decade or more, Kim has organized for teenagers from the South side of Chicago, many who have never left their neighborhoods, come to northern Michigan to simply have fun in our wonderland. She welcomes the crew of about 12 with a barbeque, and leads trips to water parks, kayaking adventures, biking around Mackinaw Island, visiting the Grand Hotel, and swimming every chance they get. The kids from My Block, My Hood, My City, love our awardee.

Whether it's the winter cold, Hurricanes, musicians from Africa, students needing an adult to read to, or those suffering in war, Kim is always ready to serve. Her heart is wide open to service.



**Dusty Culton**

Dusty's contributions have occurred over several years. Dusty was like a protégé to Mike McDonald. There were many, many contributions to Safe Harbor, going above and beyond. Dusty was very willing to take the overnight shift, and often took additional overnight shifts whenever sufficient volunteers could not be found, as well as covering many of the other volunteer activities as they might pop up.

Dusty has been heavily involved in the Annual Budget Drive as part of that team, showing up week after week to speak to the congregation. Calling themselves the "cheerleader" for the Stewardship team and for the congregation during the drive.

Dusty was part of the Ministerial Search Team which brought Alex to our congregation; part of the group which developed our current covenant and was on the Staff Resources committee for 4 years.

Dusty has also been on the Finance Committee for 4 years; spending much personal time (e.g. showing up every day and spending several hours of work helping to bring the state of our financial management from "Pretty poor" to "properly functioning" with clear accountability to UU, to its employees, and to the congregation. This has meant slogging through a multi-year backlog of financial foibles and building responsibility and accountability into the system.

Hats is off to Dusty Culton, who has done so much for this congregation, not just those of us here now, but so many who come after us, too. Let's hear it for Dusty!



**HAPPY BIRTHDAYS!**

With the new database and updated Member/Friend forms we are able to now wish a Happy Birthday on a monthly basis. If you don't see your name, you need to fill out the form. The forms are at the Welcome Table."

Barbara	Bloomer	June 04	Paul	Jensen	June 06
Judith	Briggs	June 26	Jon	Luoma	June 18
Judith	Halsted	June 12	Janet	Zerbel	June 28
Bernard	Hanchett	June 29			





Now that Chris's terms on the Board and Staff Resources Committee are drawing to a close, with Rick by her side every step of the way, we have agreed to be your new Landscape Team Chair and Co-Chair. But not without a tremendous amount of **Kudos and Gratitude for Lauren Keinath** who reinvigorated the Landscape Team back in 2017, with Karl Keinath right by her side. Lauren and Karl will remain as members of the Landscape Team, continuing work on the Meandering Path on our beautiful property. Thanks to Ken Bronston for brief leadership earlier this year and for assisting with irrigation this Spring.

Purpose - Landscape Team provides an overall, comprehensive, and holistic approach to UUCGT's outdoor space which reflects our mission and values, especially those of being a Welcoming space, with Reverence for the environment around us.

Our ask of you today – dear Congregation members – is to consider being an Adopter of one of the following special, designated Garden spaces on our property. Training and assistance will be provided. These are the areas that need Adopting:

**Harry Lauder Circle** – Near the Entry to the building, mostly weeding, and trimming the green sucker shoots as needed from the base of the small tree with twisty branches.

**Parking Lot Oval** – Also low maintenance, weeding as needed, and noticing care of the tree dedicated to the first called minister Emmy Lou Belcher.

**Center Road Entry Gardens** – Established in 2018, with removal of invasives and plants too large for the space. Native plants were added to the beds around 2020/21. With cleaning of the Entry Sign and proposed painting the background with a dark color, it is hoped this area will be more attractive. Current plants need tending and some modification.

Please contact us if you wish to fulfill a personal ministry by adopting one of these spaces. Teamwork is encouraged, and irrigation is available to most areas. [Rick9709@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Rick9709@sbcglobal.net) or [chris9709@sbcglobal.net](mailto:chris9709@sbcglobal.net)

**Current garden space Adopters are:**

Richard Miller & Team, **Memorial Garden**,

Mary Anne Rivers, **Garden By the Numbers** (Ninebark shrub and Seven Son Flower tree), to the left of front entry to the building,

Chris and Rick Walter, **Sunny Maple**, West of the Office windows, and

Jalene Moore, **Shady Oval**, East of the back entry to the building.

Kerry Alspaugh, **Shady East Beds** along the Nursery and RE Windows

Focus for the rest of Spring and Summer is to Tend all garden spaces in preparation for the arrival of 1,000 native plant plugs from the AuSable Institute of Environmental Studies. Thanks to Andi Kramer for writing and procuring Grant acceptance for enhancing our property with these plants as part of the Sacred Grounds Project. All congregants, including our children and youth, will be asked to help plant in the Fall. Stay tuned!





Unitarian Universalist Congregation of  
Grand Traverse (UUCGT)  
6726 Center Road  
Traverse City, MI 49686 –1802

TO: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**UUCGT's Newsletter –the BEACON-**  
*June 2024 Issue "Sand and Seagulls"*