

Interim Minister Search Profile

April 2024

Please provide a brief reason why your congregation is in search (Optional):

Our minister for the past seven years, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, has accepted an offer to candidate at Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Benefits & Compensation

Select all benefits being offered

Self-employment offset tax **Yes**

Retirement Plan **Yes**

UUA Health Plan **Yes**

Other Health Plan **No**

Disability Coverage **Yes**

Term Life Insurance **Yes**

Dental **Yes**

Professional Expense Allowance **Yes**

We also offer sick days, vacation days, paid holidays, and floating holidays.

For more information, please refer to our Personnel Policy:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mee7dwM7KvCWoXc45Q0XNVyayds1v5Gu/view?usp=sharing>

Minister

Describe the minister's role in relation to other paid staff:

Per our Bylaws, section 9.3.9, the minister will act “as chief of staff, be responsible for the selection, termination, supervision, compensation recommendations, and annual written evaluations of all paid staff.”

Our minister directly supervises our administrative director, religious growth and learning director, and music director. The administrative director oversees the work of the administrative associate and office volunteers. Preschool lead teacher, childcare providers, and RGL volunteers are supervised by the religious growth and learning director. The music director is the supervisor of the choir director.

For more information, please refer to our Personnel Policy:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mee7dwM7KvCWoXc45Q0XNVyayds1v5Gu/view?usp=sharing>

What are the top three things your next minister should focus on to have a successful ministry with you?

Continued education and reinvigoration of stewardship in our congregation.

Help our church rebuild a lay-led pastoral care team.

Work with the lay leaders and congregants as we revisit our vision and mission statements.

List and describe the desired strengths for the minister:

We're ready to envision our post-pandemic better selves. We've recently made difficult budget decisions that better reflect our new reality. In pursuing what we are becoming, we'd like a minister who inspires joy and a sense of humor as we tackle the hard stuff. We want a minister who will

thoughtfully manage our staff; who has a strong sense of worship design and will nurture and educate our lay leaders; and who will walk with the congregation as we deepen our faith development and community building. We want a minister who responds to congregants' emails and phone calls; who is a good communicator and listener; and a person willing to build relationships, especially with the oldest members of our church as they come to the end of their lives. We want a minister with broad perspectives, a good preacher, and a collaborator who cares about individuals from all faith backgrounds.

Describe any ongoing momentum at your Congregation which the minister should continue:

We want our interim minister to continue to:

work with the leaders and congregants as we revisit our vision and mission statements.

encourage the congregation's work in social justice, community interfaith justice network, and community outreach.

commit to our priorities of increasing involvement and engagement across all parts of the congregation and strengthening volunteer leadership

nurture the spiritual development of the worship associates and offer faith development classes for congregants

pursue ways to strengthen stewardship and increase membership

Describe any programs or traditions which the minister should maintain:

Music is an important part of our worship service, with 3-4 hymns and multiple guest musician pieces throughout each service. We welcome children into the worship service and offer a "Time for All Ages" story. Many special services have become traditional throughout the year: Water Communion, Stranger Share our Fire, Child Dedication, Bridging, Coming of Age, Christmas Eve candlelight service, tent revival featuring the church's "A Street Band," Flower Communion, and outdoor service in a city park.

Is the congregation an Honor Congregation to the UUA? Does your congregation support the UUA's Annual Program Fund at the Honor level?

The Unitarian Church of Lincoln has been an Honor Congregation for over 25 years.

Describe how trust is built between the congregation and the minister:

Trust comes from listening to all voices, not just the loudest ones. Trust is built by being truthful and transparent with current strengths and weaknesses. Trust comes with clear communication and responsiveness to people's concerns, as we live our

Covenant of Right Relations. Trust comes from a willingness to have tough conversations and to meet people where they are—imperfections and all.

How is trust in your congregation right now? Do congregants and leaders trust ministers? Are leaders trusted to lead?

Many who showed up at our April 14th listening session acknowledged their trust in our lay leadership. Our outgoing minister is a gifted preacher and a young man who is trusted to inform but not always trusted to connect personally. Trust grows out of honest communication. Trust grows with creativity and new ways of thinking that emerge through observation and honest engagement.

Our congregation had a difficult experience with an interim minister in the past who verbally and emotionally abused some staff and congregants (see "Additional Ministerial History Notes" for more information). Some

people in our church have concerns about the interim search process. We recognize that all ministers are different, and the subsequent interim worked to rebuild trust in our church community.

How has your ministry changed since COVID began? Where do you see decline? What have you let go of? Where do you see fresh energy?

The immediate change with COVID was the move from in-person to virtual services. This carried through with other church functions operating virtually, e.g., meetings via Zoom and more use of Google Drive, all of which have continued to lead to more communication and connection. The increased reliance on audio-visual technology has led to improvements in AV capability and use in services, including lyrics to hymns on an overhead screen as a supplement to the hymnals and greatly improved visuals during the storytime for children sequence. Our services continue to be live-streamed, recorded and archived on our YouTube channel. There continues to be a percentage of online viewers during services, although in-person participation has slowly resumed.

Although there has been an increase in new members in the last year, there was a significant drop in membership in 2022 and 2023. This recent decline in total pledge income is discussed in greater detail elsewhere. There have been some additional challenges in recruiting volunteer positions.

We had to let go of the practice of meeting in person for a period of time. There is more acceptance now of some individuals joining services and meetings remotely. Perhaps this could be interpreted as letting go of some of the traditional ways of interacting.

Social justice has been one area where efforts have been energizing—supporting an Afghan family and the Justice in Action program are but two examples. There is much affirmation in this work.

Another area with fresh energy has been music. The choir has several new members, and it is a joy to see the congregation's reaction to performances with the addition of new voices. The "A Street Band" (which performs primarily at the Third Thursday services) has also added new members, including two young members in the last couple of years. The music selected for their performances is eclectic and has been generally very well received by the congregation.

The Worship Associates have become a more integral part of services and the rotation of individuals participating has been very positive. We have many talented and articulate people here, and even small changes like occasionally altering the seating arrangement have brought a feeling of renewed energy.

Have you passed the Eighth Principle, or is the congregation in process of moving to a congregational vote?

Yes, we passed the Eighth Principle at the Spring Congregational Meeting in May of 2023 by a 98% yes vote, after months of educational programming. This work was guided by a group of people who had been through sections of the Beloved Conversations program. More information can be found on our website:

<https://www.unitarianlincoln.org/8thprinciple.html>

How did the last ministry end (or how is it ending)? How is the congregation doing with this time of transition?

Our current minister accepted an offer to candidate at another church at the end of March. He personally contacted the board and other lay leaders. Then a letter was sent to the congregation before the minister announced his departure at the Easter Sunday service. We celebrate all we have accomplished as a community, but also this change has brought feelings of grief, anxiety, loss, and varying emotions that may evolve over time.

How is technology currently used in your congregation and what are the expectations of the minister around that?

Over the past seven years, our congregation has spent over \$20,000 to produce a good sound experience in the sanctuary and live-stream on YouTube. This money was spent on good microphones, two excellent cameras, a Black Magic video switcher, a new computer, and in-room professional sound adjustments. We have a good Allen & Heath soundboard and a hard-wired internet connection.

Our administrative director puts the order of service on Google Slides, which are projected on the overhead screen and the livestream during Sunday services. Increased use of Google Drive has allowed for better collaboration, communication, and connection across all areas of church life, and we expect the minister to be comfortable using Google Drive, Zoom, and YouTube. Currently, a group of volunteers (the AV committee) support the audiovisual needs of Sunday services and rentals in the sanctuary.

Congregation:

Describe your congregation and its culture:

Our intergenerational congregation has a wide range of diversity in age, socioeconomic levels, experience, involvement, and beliefs. We have a culture of care for each other, our community, and our world. We have a long tradition of being a place of welcome and sanctuary for the LGBTQIA+ community in Lincoln. Many of our members are passionate about specific ideas, especially social justice. We tend to encourage new members to fit into old ways but are trying to pivot away from that toward new ways of being in community with each other. A growing group of people are willing to embrace change.

Describe and provide examples of how your congregation lives its values:

Our church mission and vision focus on showing up to transform ourselves and the world. We do that in many ways, including:

- supporting ten local nonprofits through Share the Plate annually
- sponsorship of an Afghan refugee family
- representation on the interfaith housing coalition
- sharing our building with community groups such as the Nebraska Chamber Players, Bluestem Montessori, PFLAG, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, the Nebraska Music Teachers' Association, Order of the Red Grail, and more
- revised our bylaws to remove a pledge requirement for membership to be more inclusive
- community care through card senders, Friendly Faces visitations, and comfort shawls
- organizing and delivering large dinners (including leftovers that can be used during the week) to the residents of Fresh Start Home for Women
- care for new members with personal contacts and "get acquainted" dinners
- prioritizing the earth by building-wide recycling, geothermal system, solar panels, and a pantry garden
- offering robust small group ministries, including Open Circles since 2000 and UU Connects groups
- supporting many causes including children raising money for UNICEF and Social Justice committee selling Fair Trade items
- promoting ongoing learning through sponsoring the Sorensen Lectures and Winter Lecture Series
- civic engagement on social justice issues through letter-writing campaigns to local, state, and national leaders
- one of the founding faith communities of Justice in Action, an interfaith justice network in Lancaster County
- continued involvement with re-indigenizing southeast Nebraska

Safe Congregation Policy:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vCqrJEgV9KLVFzTQGvQT8A46DGTEAOxg/view?usp=sharing>

Worship service schedule (Include details such as dress code, child care, and religious education programs, as well as Summer hour variations.)

Sunday services are held in-person and via livestream at 10 a.m. The video from the service is then posted on YouTube for people to view later. Worship associates support the minister in leading Sunday services. On Sundays when the minister is not preaching and for several weeks during the summer, the services are led by the worship associates. Our church also offers a Third Thursday service once a month on a Thursday evening. The Third Thursday services are usually less traditional, often featuring our church's own "A Street Band." All involved in the services have access to a worship grid in Google Drive.

Typical Sunday services start with a welcome, chalice lighting, and opening words. We usually have 3-4 hymns interspersed through the service and music from guest musicians. A "Time for All Ages" story is read for both the young and young at heart. Sharing Joys and Sorrows is an integral part of our church's worship service. The worship associates often give many of the readings. Our service themes follow Soul Matters.

Seating in our sanctuary is flexible. Our church has chairs instead of pews, which can be arranged in various configurations depending on the needs of the service.

Our dress code varies depending on personal preference. Our past experience with ministers' attire ranges from robe and stole to classic business attire. Our congregants dress casually for the most part.

Childcare is offered during services for infants and children up to 5 years old. Childcare is also offered during some meetings. For many Sunday Services, children and youth stay for approximately fifteen minutes.

Generally, children attend the first 15 minutes or so of the service and go to their classes after the "Time for All Ages" story. Within the sanctuary, we have a small table with crafts and activities to engage children (and adults if they choose). We have several intergenerational services when children and youth stay for the entire service.

History

Provide your Congregation's Founding History

Our church has a long history in Lincoln and a long-time reputation for social justice work in Nebraska.

The First Universalist Society was organized on September 1, 1870, in the home of J.D. and Mary Monell. There were eight charter members. They possessed property on the corner of Twelfth and H streets from a grant they secured from the State legislature. Through persistent fundraising, a small frame chapel was built and dedicated on June 3, 1872.

With financial aid from the denomination, the society called Rev. James Gerton to be its first pastor. He was forced to resign in 1873 due to lack of funds. In 1883 they called Rev. E.H. Chapin and constructed a parsonage. The Unitarians in Lincoln organized and adopted a constitution in 1891 and built their church on 12th and H in 1893. The church reorganized on May 27, 1898, and became All Souls Unitarian Church with ninety-six charter members. The members were Universalists and Unitarians as both groups combined resources to pay off the loan on the church. All Souls Unitarian

Church, which existed for over forty years, changed its name to The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska in 1951.

Our first home was a large brick structure at 12th and H streets. In 1960, the congregation built a new church, its current home, at 6300 A Street, and the first service was held in the new building on October 1, 1961. In 2014 the building underwent a 2.5 million dollar renovation which added geothermal heating and cooling, as well as 100 solar panels on our roof.

Describe Important Events in your Congregation's History

1870—First meeting of the Lincoln Unitarian Society at the home of Mary Monell.

1898—Merger of Unitarians and Universalists in Lincoln to form All Soul's Unitarian Church.

Ministry of Rev. Arthur Weatherly: from 1908 to 1920 and again from 1929 to 1942. An influential and dynamic minister who grew the size of church membership significantly, and young peoples' groups flourished. He was an anti-war activist and founder of the Nebraska Peace Society, and also a champion of women's suffrage. He was considered the father of Worker's Compensation law in Nebraska.

1930—Unveiling of the mural entitled "The Search For Truth" by Elizabeth Dolan. She also produced murals for the Nebraska Natural History Museum, the state capital, and the University of Nebraska. The mural was situated behind the pulpit.

1951—The church changes its name from All Souls Unitarian Church to The Unitarian Church of Lincoln.

1960—Members of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln voted unanimously in favor of the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America.

June 1960—Groundbreaking for the current church building at 6300 A Street.

Ministry of Charles Stephen: from 1961-1996. The church's longest-serving minister, known for his powers of writing and oration. A founder of Lincoln's Planned Parenthood chapter as well as the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union.

1991—Establishment of the Interfaith Housing Coalition to purchase and manage two low-income apartment buildings. Member churches are the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, First Plymouth UCC, and St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

1991—Founding of Fresh Start Home, a transitional women's housing facility. The project was spearheaded by Rev. Charles Stephen and several church volunteers, among others.

1997—Designated as a Welcoming Congregation through UUA.

1998—Publication of "The First 100 Years - 1898-1998 The Unitarian Church of Lincoln" by Margaret Seymour.

2000—The Unitarian Church of Lincoln hosted the annual Prairie Star District regional assembly.

2007—Special congregational meeting was held to vote to retain or dismiss Rev. Fritz Hudson. Outcome: 192 votes, 151 to retain, 39 to dismiss, 2 abstentions

2012—Designated as a Green Sanctuary Congregation through UUA.

June 2013—Congregational vote on a capital campaign for church building expansion and renovation project: Outcome: 115 yes votes, 1 no vote, 1 abstention, and 1 "hell yes" vote.

2015—Renovated building rededication service.

December 2019—Last member loan repaid to complete capital campaign for church building expansion and renovation project.

2018—Over fifty members and friends of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln attended the General Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri.

January 2020—Launched a second Sunday morning service due to increased attendance

March 17, 2020—The last service was held in the church building prior to COVID lockdown. Pivoted to online services.


2020—150th Anniversary of Universalist Church founding. Events were held virtually or delayed due to COVID.

Autumn 2021—Returned to in-person Sunday service while still offering live streaming option

2022—Unitarian Church of Lincoln co-founded Justice in Action.

May 2023—the Unitarian Church of Lincoln passed the 8th Principle

Attachment: “History, Heroes & Hope” recorded May 2021 as part of UCL’s 150th anniversary celebration. Other history videos are available on the church’s Youtube channel.

 History, Heroes & Hope.mp4

Additional Ministerial History Notes (Optional) Any additional details or stories to tell?

Reverend Peter S. Raible 1955 - 1960*

Rev. Peter Raible came to Lincoln in December 1955 from the First Unitarian Church of Providence, Rhode Island, where he had been an assistant minister. He belonged to a family of Unitarian ministers. Peter and his wife, Dee, were well-liked by members of the congregation. They were young and enthusiastic. The church membership had become divided during the previous stressful year, but Rev. Raible proved capable of smoothing some of the tensions.

His involvement in community activities mainly involved race relations, and he was twice elected president of the Malone Community Center.

In addition to re-unifying the congregation, he was involved in the discussions about building a new church building. Every detail of the plan was of interest to him, and he worked closely with the architect and the church committees. He took part in the groundbreaking ceremony and in laying the cornerstone on December 11, 1960. However, he never had the opportunity to make use of the church he helped to plan. In October he received a call to the University Unitarian Church in Seattle—his wife Dee’s home church. It was a call he couldn’t refuse, and the Raible family left Lincoln in January 1961. (Taken from materials gathered for UCL’s 150th-anniversary display)

* Prior to 2024 with the departure of Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Peter Raible was the last minister in 64 years to leave the Unitarian Church of Lincoln to go to another church. The two other ministers serving within that timespan retired.

In November 2007, a special congregational meeting was held to vote to retain or dismiss Rev. Fritz Hudson. The outcome, based on 192 votes, was 151 to retain, 39 to dismiss, and 2 abstentions. Thirty-six members had signed a petition to dismiss Rev. Hudson (a petition signed by at least 10% of the congregation is required for a congregational vote. Congregational membership stood at 334). The petitioners based this action primarily on their dissatisfaction with Rev. Hudson’s handling of a complex situation regarding a congregant who was a registered sex offender and access to the education wing of the church. It was a turbulent time within the congregation and some people did resign from membership. One outcome of the experience was that Nancy Heege and Nancy Combs Morgan of the (then) Prairie Star District conducted a congregational

assessment and provided a thorough report which the board used to implement programs such as a constructive conflict workshop and the formation of a self-study committee. That committee visited nearby churches in Ames, Iowa, Omaha, Nebraska, Des Moines, Iowa and Kansas City, Missouri to learn about programs within those churches and how they dealt with contentious issues. The committee also hosted listening sessions called “Hot Potato Discussions” for congregants to voice their opinions and feelings about upcoming decision points within the church. Rev. Hudson did make positive changes in relating to the congregation and served successfully until his retirement in 2014.

Following the retirement of Rev. Fritz Hudson in 2014, UCL entered an interim period that ultimately lasted three years. In August 2014, the board hired Rev. Dr. Justin Osterman as an interim minister with the expectation of his service during a two-year interim. He left at the end of one year. His time at UCL was difficult in many respects, particularly with staff and church leadership due to his abusive managerial style. (Other churches had similar bad experiences with Rev. Dr. Osterman and he is no longer serving in UU ministry). The Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods was then hired and her nurturing and supportive style of ministry was a great help to those who were hurting. She served from 2015-2017. She spent her first year helping the church to heal and the second year getting the congregation ready for its next settled minister. The experience with Rev. Dr. Osterman broke many bonds of trust both within the congregation and in how several members viewed the UUA. Gretchen Woods helped to build back that trust and the inter-congregational trust has continued to build in the intervening years. Some congregants still experience residual trauma from those experiences a decade ago.

Describe any important Lay Leaders (Optional) Who were the lay leaders who covered when you had no minister

Board President Judy Hart managed the staff while Rev. Sinclair was on sabbatical from January - June 2023.

Membership and Finances

You can add notes and comments to each year of data below, to provide context to ministers in search who may view your Record.

Notes on Membership and Finances:

Our pledges to the operating budget have fluctuated in the last few years. Sometimes we have addressed this through drawing on reserve funds and utilizing pandemic paycheck protection program funds to ensure staff and minister salary maintenance. Other years we have made special fund drive appeals to members. For our 2024 budget, we were able to bring staff and ministerial salaries to midpoint; however, to develop a balanced budget, we made the difficult decision to reduce staff hours, furlough our minister for three months, and cut programming. Job descriptions were re-evaluated to balance workload with reduced hours.

Average Sunday Attendance: 2024—84; 2023—83; 2022—80; 2021—47. Average attendance data from 2021-2024 only includes in-person attendance, not those who watch the live stream or YouTube video at a different time. For 2021, we offered virtual-only services for half the year and hybrid services for the other half.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
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2024	\$322,295	\$486,230	316	56	84*
2023	\$359,094	\$455,808	253	73	83*
2022	\$358,998	\$429,042	285	44	80*
2021	\$313,625	\$406,815	321	72	47*
2020	\$353,289	\$411,506	289	81	160
2019	\$331,977	\$397,767	290	96	161

Demographics:

Part of the UUA's commitment to countering oppression, racism, and white supremacy culture in our faith involves understanding who we are and how we can be better. These questions are designed to provide useful information for prospective ministers as well as the UUA who, in partnership with the Commission on Institutional Change, uses this information to analyze the impact of racial disparities within our faith communities. You may choose to select "We are unable to provide this information."

Answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color? The term "people of color" may include people who are of African descent, Asian, Caribbean, Latinx and Hispanic, Middle Eastern/Arab, Native/American Indian or other indigenous ancestry, Pacific Islander, and multiracial.

About 5-10% of our congregants identify as people of color

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

Around 15 - 20% of our congregation identifies as LGBTQIA+

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation: Our congregation is approximately 30% male, 65% female, 5% nonbinary/genderqueer

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color? 0

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams? 1

How many of your Board of Trustees (also called covering board, standing committee, etc.) identify as people of color? 0

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership (e.g. recruitment or leadership development programs)?

Many congregants and staff members participated in Beloved Conversations. Around 50+ people from our church took part in "Within" and 20 people participated in "Among." This involvement led to many conversations within our church about diversity, race, and culture.

These conversations led our church to adopt the 8th Principle after six months of intensive learning opportunities and more than a year of planning.

Through the summer Indigenous Program, our congregants were involved in education, worship services, and partnerships with Indigenous people in the community. We have a continuing relationship with the Otoe-Missouria Tribe in Oklahoma.

Members of our congregation are active on the NAACP board.

Our Personnel Policies, section two states:

"The Unitarian Church of Lincoln (UCL) seeks to provide equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, gender,

sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, national origin, age, disability, or other protected status. UCL fully complies with all applicable Federal, State, and local anti-discrimination laws.”

Accessibility:

Wheelchair accessibility details (Optional)

All main areas are accessible on the first level. Entrances and all rooms on the main level are free from barriers that may impede a wheelchair or others with mobility challenges. Because we have moveable chairs and not pews, people who use a wheelchair have choices where to sit. All bathrooms have wheelchair-accessible stalls and an accessible gender-neutral bathroom is available. We have multiple designated parking spaces for people with mobility challenges. Our main entrance has automatic door openers.

Two areas we need to consider for accessibility include our pulpit and the basement. Our pulpit is on a raised platform and accessible via steps with no railing. Our storage and mechanical rooms are in the basement and accessible only via stairs. We do have a space to install an elevator but do not have the funds to do so yet.

Assisted listening system details (Optional)

We have assisted listening devices and braille hymnals. This past year we have been researching installing a hearing loop system.

Describe other ways your congregation has dealt with accessibility:

Because we have speakers in several places throughout the building and live-stream our service, those who choose not to be in the sanctuary for the service can be in our large, open gallery room and hear the service or can watch wherever and whenever they choose on our YouTube channel. Zoom is offered as an option for many of our committee meetings, Program Council meetings, and board meetings. We offer digital newsletters and printed newsletters for people who prefer a paper copy. Our congregational meetings offer multiple ways of voting—online, paper, and reading the ballot to someone with limited sight.

Congregants offer rides to people unable to drive. In the sanctuary, we often reserve chairs at the end of aisles for people with mobility difficulties and have chairs with armrests for ease of sitting and standing.

We welcome neurodiversity and have inclusive programming for all youth and children. All classrooms are accessible to those of all abilities.

Resources and Programs

List the resources and programs your congregation used or participated in during the past year: Examples: Welcoming Congregations Program, Green Sanctuary, BLUU Teach-In, UUSC Share the Plate, Partner Church,...

- Ongoing partnership with Rev. Kimberly Debus, Affiliate Minister
- Use of Soul Matters packets in both worship, small group ministry, and religious education
- Starting Point classes
- Our Whole Lives classes
- Continuing Beloved Conversations activities
- Involvement with General Assembly
- Welcoming Congregation
- Green Sanctuary

Describe your religious educational programs

Our religious education curriculum for ages kindergarten through fifth grade uses the Soul Matters religious education resources. By using Soul Matters in our religious education classrooms, the themes of our church services correlate with what children are experiencing in their classes. Our middle school and high school students hold discussions and do a variety of activities through the lens of UU values. Teachers and assistants attend training annually. Attendance in our religious education program fluctuates from week to week, and overall attendance has dropped since the pandemic. We also offer Our Whole Lives programming for grades kindergarten through high school, and this program had a thriving attendance in 2023.

Our preschool and childcare providers read stories reflecting UU values and develop connections with our youngest children through play both in the preschool room and in the connected nature-based playground. All children and youth can enjoy playing outside on the climbing structure or exploring the church grounds which include a garden, wooded area, and pantry garden where we grow edible plants.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs (if applicable)

We do not currently have a campus ministry program. Our middle school and high school students are part of a group called "Youth in Action" which focuses on community and social justice issues.

Surrounding Community

Describe the character of the surrounding community, including population and demographics

The "general" character of Lincoln – from exprealty.com - "Often overshadowed by its big-city cousin Omaha, Lincoln stands out on its own merits as a friendly and affordable city with plenty to offer. Living in Lincoln, Nebraska, has many perks, including a diverse economy, a rich arts and culture scene, numerous educational institutions, and abundant outdoor recreational activities."

Demographics: Lincoln is located in Lancaster County and is the state capital of Nebraska. The 2022 US census counted 291,082 people, 115,930 households, and 67,277 families in Lincoln. The racial makeup was 78.66% (228,956) white, 4.67% (13,605) black or African-American, 0.89% (2,589) Native American, 4.77% (13,871) Asian, 0.07% (196) Pacific Islander, 3.5% (10,175) from other races, and 7.45% (21,690) from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 7.0% (22,321) of the population.

Designated as a "refugee-friendly" city by the U.S. Department of State in the 1970s, the city was the 12th-largest resettlement site per capita in the country by 2000. Refugee Vietnamese, Karen (Burmese ethnic minority), Sudanese, and Yazidi (Iraqi ethnic minority) people, as well as refugees from Iraq, the Middle East, and Afghanistan have resettled in the city. During the 2022-2023 school year, Lincoln Public Schools provided support for more than 3,000 students from 152 countries, who spoke over 100 different languages.

The median age in Nebraska is approximately 36.2 years of age. The ratio of females to males is currently at approximately 50.3% females and 49.7% males.

Housing – from Zillow -the median rent in Lincoln is \$1,236. The average Lincoln home value is \$270,193, up 4.3% over the past year.

Religious preferences across the state: Nebraska weighs in with 75% Christian-based faiths, 4% non-Christian-based faiths, and 20% unaffiliated with any religion. There is one Unitarian Church in Lincoln. Nebraska also has the First and Second Unitarian churches in Omaha, a small fellowship in Kearney (about 130 miles west), and Prairie Vista Unitarian Universalist Church in Scottsbluff (western Nebraska).

Lincoln is home to the University of Nebraska, chartered as a land-grant university on February 15, 1869, to create opportunity for the state of Nebraska. A proud member of the Big Ten Conference, the Big Ten Academic Alliance, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), Nebraska is classified within the Carnegie “R1: Doctoral Universities – Highest Research Activity” category.

Lincoln Public Schools is the second-largest public school district in Nebraska, renowned for its long-standing legacy of educational excellence and tradition of rigorous academic achievement. The school district is growing and thriving, serving over 42,000 students in more than 60 schools and programs. “Education Equity -The Lincoln Public School District does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, genetic information, citizenship status, or economic status in its programs, activities, and employment.”

Lincoln is known for its strong Republican support, but there are also numerous Democrats and other independent voters who have been making their voices heard over the past few years. There is no shortage of civic engagement as people debate various topics such as healthcare access, economic development, education reform, public safety initiatives, arts funding, infrastructure projects, transportation upgrades, and much more.

Politically, Lancaster County, NE is leaning liberal. In Lancaster County, 52.3% of the people voted Democrat in the last presidential election, 44.6% voted for the Republican Party, and the remaining 3.1% voted Independent. In the last Presidential election, Lancaster County remained moderately Democratic, 52.3% to 44.6% Lancaster County voted Democratic in 2020, 2016, and 2008, and voted Republican in 2012, 2004, and 2000.

There are 3,077 nonprofit organizations in the greater Lincoln metro area. Combined, these Lincoln metro nonprofits employ 29,283 people, earn more than \$4 billion in revenue each year, and have assets of \$11 billion.

How is your congregation known/perceived by the larger community?

In 2022, UCL was a founding member of Justice in Action (JIA) an interfaith, grassroots coalition of faith communities in Lancaster County, Nebraska, to harness the power of organized people to address big community problems.

Within JIA, UCL is recognized as a small church that shows up with lots of people! The perception is that Unitarians understand justice differently than some faith communities. The three community issues currently being researched are Affordable Housing; Adult Pretrial Diversion; and the demand for a Mental Health Navigation system for Lancaster County.

In the broader community, UCL is perceived as a welcoming community partner and a haven for liberal thinking. Living a liberal faith within a conservative state is challenging at times for youth and adults.

The Unitarian Church participates in the local Pride events every year and is recognized as a “UUA Welcoming Congregation.” UCL is known for starting and supporting big ideas. Congregants attend public rallies, city council, and county commission meetings. Our UCL social justice and green sanctuary committees educate and motivate congregants to participate in letter-writing campaigns, and advocacy on the local, regional, and state level.

There has been an intentional movement to deepen relationships with both Omaha congregations so that we can discuss leadership and volunteerism, and garner support more quickly for issues that come up in the state legislature.

Describe your congregation's religious, political, and social context from a historical and current perspective.

The clergy and lay leaders of UCL have been sitting at the community decision-making tables for most of its 150 years of existence. Currently, our Minister Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair is the co-president of Justice in Action and our past BOT President is the Secretary. UCL lay leaders are on all three community problems research teams. www.justice-in-action.org

From the Lincoln City Council, Planned Parenthood, Lincoln General Hospital, NAACP, and beyond to the Parks, Lincoln Electric System, and voting rights, members of our church have participated in leadership and community decision-making. Our Minister Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, served as president of the Lancaster Faith Coalition for two years.

The Winter Lecture Series began at Vine Congregational Church in 1985. The first year the topic of the series was Central America. That topic set the early trend of the series focusing each year on a single country or a region of the world. In 2001 the Unitarian Church inherited the Winter Lecture Series. With that change, besides focusing on single countries or regions, sometimes our annual topics were cross-cutting issues such as human rights, poverty, or environmental issues.

Board of Trustees Priorities 2023-24: aligning staff and ministerial salaries with the UUA-suggested midpoint guidelines; implementing a funding plan for building and grounds sustainability; increasing involvement and engagement across all parts of the congregation and strengthening volunteer leadership; expanding collaborative efforts on human rights advocacy including but not limited to Justice in Action, legislative advocacy, and social movements that align with our denominational values.

We currently have advisory board representation from UCL in a multi-year Mellon grant called "Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors: Re-Indigenizing Southeast Nebraska" a collaboration between the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma, the city of Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska.

In 2019, we added a second Sunday service, the third Thursday services were gaining traction and our congregation was growing.

2020-23: Pandemic years and then the climbing out of isolation.

A lot happened during this time. We closed and reopened our church building as public health in our area allowed. We had technology-savvy folks on the staff, and we immediately jumped into weekly video updates from the minister and broadcast Sunday services through YouTube. Some members refused to participate online and many of those didn't return after the isolation ended. Zoom meetings continue to be convenient for getting business done, and many committees are meeting in person.

In 2021, the board created a task force to dismantle white supremacy in our church systems. We started with a full congregational survey to find out how people were feeling about their connection to racism. We identified tender spots and areas of education needed and began to change ourselves and UCL. During the time of the survey, 50+ church members participated in Beloved Conversations—the signature offering of The Fahs Collaborative at Meadville Lombard Theological School. It is a program for Unitarian Universalists seeking to embody racial justice as a spiritual practice. We participated in both the "Within" and "Among" programs. "Within" was an individual focus and "Among" focused on identifying systemic change. Some outcomes from our involvement in this work manifested in small group ministry, a land acknowledgment, a plain language rewrite of our

bylaws (which took 14 months), two summers of indigenous programming, the successful application for our own 501 c3 nonprofit designation, the passage of the 8th Principle, and deeper relationships with the ACLU, Native peoples, and the NAACP.

In 2022, our minister was granted a 6-month sabbatical from January to June 2023. While the minister was away, the board held monthly forums and listening circles for people to discuss our mission and vision, stewardship, and leadership.