

About UU Congregation of the Catskills

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.uucatskills.org>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

320 Sawkill Rd
Kingston, NY 12401-1225

This Congregation **has** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

IMPORTANT: The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Catskills (UUCatskills) is seeking either a full time minister shared jointly with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie (UUFPP) or a half-time minister to serve our congregation solely.

We have spoken together at length and believe that sharing a minister could create an enriched experience for each congregation. Both congregations are successful in creating hybrid services, having committee meetings, etc using the Zoom platform. Using this technology opens up many possibilities for collaboration between the two congregation and the minister.

Both congregations are of similar size and demographics, and over the years we have had members move back and forth between the two congregations for various reasons. We have recently polled our members and we share the following top priorities for a minister:

- Lead well organized inspirational Sunday worship services and activities spanning all 6 UU sources
- Help us identify our vision and aspirations and lead efforts to achieve them.
- Foster spiritual development for individuals and groups of adults
- Be comfortable speaking about money, from the pulpit, if necessary

The two congregations are about 30 miles apart in a lovely, scenic area of the Huson River Valley. Poughkeepsie is at the northern end of commuter train line to New York city running on the east side of the river and Kingston is on the edge of the beautiful Catskill

Mountains on the west side. Both sites have close proximity to hiking, skiing boating and other outdoor activities as well as cultural and historic venues. We are fortunate to have Bard, Vassar, and Marist colleges as well as SUNY New Paltz in our area.

We invite you to look at both congregations' profiles and consider speaking with us either separately or together.

We are a congregation of members drawing from a broad geographic area of diverse financial means including the small city of Kingston and smaller towns and rural areas.

We are inclusive, strong, intellectual, and energetic.

While we take our work and mission as UU's very seriously, we also enjoy informal time together. We are a fun-loving group, who appreciate having a sense of humor, listening to music (we even have our own ukulele group) and enjoy spending time together after the service.

Our members are involved in the arts and music, and many are active in social justice activities that extend beyond their involvement in the congregation.

Although these past several years have been difficult due to the pandemic, we have been successful in keeping our UU community together by offering the following services:

- Zoom services every Sunday.
- Zoom tech host training sessions.
- Community Circles that are organized by neighborhood meet monthly either outdoors or during monthly Zoom meetings
- Story time for young and old online.

We have continued all committee and Board of Trustee meetings such as: Racial Justice , Climate Action Team, Buddhacats (UU's who meet to discuss Buddhism). Women's Conversation Circle and others. All these groups have been meeting on Zoom during the pandemic. (More details in Resources and Programs regarding RE and other offerings)

Your Congregation's mission:

Our mission is : Diversity, Community, Growth, and Action

With respect for diversity of beliefs, identities, and approaches we offer: a compassionate supportive, welcoming community, provide opportunities for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth, and empower our members to act on our UU Principles in the world around us.

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

We've written and distributed a publication entitled "Coming Back to Ulster County". This is a resource for agencies and former prisoners. However, it currently needs updating and translating into Spanish.

We give half of our basket contributions as donations to several local non-profit organizations. These groups are determined each year by the board from members' suggestions.

On a rotating basis we contribute food to the local Free Food Fridges, volunteer for and contribute needed items to Ulster Immigration Defense Network (UIDN) and participate in activities sponsored by the LGBTQ? and African American communities.

We contribute needed items, provide transportation and volunteer at the weekly food distribution for Ulster Immigrant Defense Network.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

We have a Safe Congregation policy, but it is not available online.

Worship service schedule:

Sundays 10:30 a.m. Hybrid (in person and/or Zoom)

We have a "come as you are" dress code and all are welcome. We have a Restless Room where parents with very young children can stay and still hear the service if they wish.

We also provide childcare and have an RE program that meets during the Sunday Service.

We provide coffee and light refreshments for a social time after the service. Those on Zoom are invited into breakout rooms for socializing.

Personnel

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Carma Haas	Treasurer		2019
Robert Janis-Dillon	Minister	20	2021
Mark Howenstein	President/Chair		2021
Erin Hilgart	Vice President/Chair		2022
Jane Podell	Religious Exploration Coordinator	10	2017
Catherine Cattabiani	Music Director	10	2010
Sarah Bissonnette-Adler	Office Administrator	10	2022

Additional personnel notes:

We are the recipients of a Chalice Lighter's Grant and with that we have hired a marketing consultant to help us reach out to the wider community with improved social media, the appearance of our website, etc.

We are also focusing on clarifying and improving our internal communication efforts.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

The Unitarian Fellowship of Ulster County held its first meeting in Oct. 1958 at the home of Dr. Jack Moss in Saugerties, NY.

Date founded: 10/1/1958

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

In 1960 the stone house of retired minister Anita Truman Pickett was bequeathed to the fellowship.

Having outgrown that house, the fellowship purchased a building in Kingston, a former funeral home.

In Jan. 1978 they purchased the current property, a former farm.

In 1983 they called their first minister, Rev. Joan Gelbein.

In 1991 they voted to hire an extension intern minister, Nancy Bowen Martell. This initiated a period of rapid growth and a closer connection to the larger UU movement.

The congregation changed its name to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Catskills.

The sanctuary was expanded in 1995. Following 9/11 there was a period of very rapid growth and two services each Sunday were conducted. Plans for a major expansion and renovation of the sanctuary were drawn. However, membership dropped off and the plans were never brought to completion.

Rev. Linda Anderson left the congregation in 2010 after 14 years.

Rev. Jan Carlson-Bull served as an interim from 2010-2012.

Rev. Dawn Sangrey served for one year, leaving for health and family issues.

Rev. Erica Baron served us for 6 years and left in 2019.

Rev. Leonisa Ardizzone served from 2019-2021. She helped to strengthen the worship committee and helped us adapt to using Zoom.

Rev. Bob Janis-Dillon served us from 2021-2023

Ministerial History

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2021	Now	Contract	Robert Janis-Dillon	Minister
2019	2021	Contract	Leonisa Ardizzone	Minister
2016	2019	Contract	Erica Baron	Minister
2013	2016	Developmental	Erica Baron	Developmental Minister
2012	2013	Developmental	Dawn Sangrey	Developmental Minister
2010	2012	Interim	Jan Carlsson-Bull	Interim Minister
1996	2010	Called	Linda Anderson	Minister
1983	1986	Called	Joan Gelbein	Minister

Ministers Emeritus/a

Name	Date Voted Emeritus/a	Year Deceased
Linda Anderson	6/1/2010	

Additional ministerial history notes:

Our congregation has been enhanced by two LGBTQ+ ministers during the years. One minister was with us for 14 years and during that time there was a growth in LGBTQ+ members and friends many of whom remain active in our congregation today.

After four years with a two-year interim minister and two-year developmental minister, we hired a full time minister, Rev. Erica Baron. In mutual agreement, her time was reduced to 3/4 time for the final years of her contract.

We then hired Rev. Leonisa Ardizzone as 1/2 time contract minister. She remained with us for two years fulfilling her contract. She left under difficult circumstances.

We then hired Rev. Bob Janis-Dillon as a 1/2 time contract minister with his request that, for personal reasons he would only serve two years.

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below comes directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2023	\$112,528	\$153,174	107	10	
2022*	\$111,300	\$136,665	105		
2021	\$101,890	\$132,097	100	13	
2020	\$105,945	\$152,711	95	14	56
2019	\$112,635	\$132,364	103	12	55
2018	\$96,091	\$130,026	101	15	55
2017	\$92,216	\$126,135	102	18	52
2016	\$110,520	\$153,500	102	20	63
2015	\$119,669	\$161,857	110	8	65
2014	\$115,488	\$150,974	120	20	85
2013	\$140,794	\$151,876	126	20	58

The following notes and/or explanations have been offered by the congregation:

Year	Note/Explanation
2022	Our Youth Enrollment for 2022 is 10.

Year **Note/Explanation**
Our Average Attendance for this year is 5.

Demographics

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

1-4%

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

10-24%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

We believe that the major gender make-up of the congregation is cis-gender with more women than men. We have an active LGBTQ+ membership which has recently formed a Gay and Straight Small Group Ministry.

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

What number of your Board of Trustees identify as people of color?

0

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to include the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership?

We continue to welcome and follow up with visitors, utilizing our membership/welcoming team. We make an effort to notice visitors at Zoom services and make a follow-up contact.

Our Anti-Racism Task force has been meeting for over two years engaging in the work of understanding personal and institutional racism. We have engaged with black-led

community organizations to support their work in areas of Criminal Justice and Food Insecurity through direct action and financial contributions.

Some members are attending community Racial Justice organizations' meetings to become more involved with their work. We are an affiliate of a local immigrant defense organization, UIDN, and we were invited to have a booth at the Kingston African American Cultural Festival which introduced our congregation to the racially and ethnically diversified community.

We have recently started an active LGBTQ+ Small Group Ministry which will be leading the revisiting of the Welcoming Congregation Program.

It is our hope, that as we become more aware of the issues surrounding racial and gender inequities that we will become true allies to those communities.

Accessibility

Is your Congregation's meeting space wheelchair accessible? Yes

Wheelchair accessibility details:

Sanctuary, bathrooms, main floor meeting rooms and offices are accessible.

We have recently completed further accessibility modifications by widening the doors into the sanctuary to accommodate wheelchairs.

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? No

Describe other ways your congregation has dealt with accessibility:

We are continually working on our air purification system, and have recently installed a more efficient heating and cooling system to meet the needs of those who use our building.

Resources & Programs

List the resources and programs your Congregation used or participated in during the past year:

- Half plate donations to local organizations.
- Social justice committee.
- Racial justice working group.
- Climate Action Team,

- Food Justice Working Group,
- Affiliation with Ulster Immigration Defense Network (UIDN) and support of their programs,
- LGBTQ support team
- Anti-racism book study/workshops using UUA Common Reads and other recommended books.
- Caring Team
- Community Circles.
- Joint worships with area congregations.
- "Soul Matters" discussion groups
- Joint worships with area congregations
- 30yrs+ adult and children's social activities group

Describe your religious educational programs:

Children's RE--

- Meets each Sunday during Sunday Service
- Occasional Multi-generational Service
- Weekly evening Bedtime Story (via Zoom) for families and children.

Adult RE--A variety of small group ministries including regular meetings of

- Buddhacats
- Women's Conversation Circle
- Creative Writing
- Great Books
- Soul Matters
- Grief Support Group

Surrounding Community

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

UU Catskills is situated in the countryside near urban Kingston with much of the culture and amenities you would expect to find in an urban area. Additionally, we are located in close proximity to the many small Hudson Valley towns, each with their own unique character and background.

The surrounding area has history that spans political, cultural, and artistic significance. From Kingston's history as the First Capital of New York State with architecture dating back to the Pre-Revolutionary War era, to the legacy of the Hudson River School artistic movement and the origins of the Woodstock music festival of 1969—each Hudson Valley town offers its own history and charm.

The year-round outdoor life is also a key attraction to the area, with numerous State Parks, the Catskill mountains and lakes and rivers, giving access to beautiful hiking, camping, and opportunities to enjoy outdoor wildlife.

In Spring and Summer, there are outdoor music festivals scattered throughout the area, and in Fall there is some of the best Fall foliage around. In winter, there are nearby places for winter sports including skiing and snow shoeing.

With New York City 100 miles away, the area has long been a place for New York City dwellers to escape to the Catskill mountains to enjoy the outdoors and the area's many charms. Increasingly, with the option for working remotely, professionals from New York City are moving to the area.

The city of Kingston's population as of 2022 is approximately 25,000; the county of Ulster 182,000. The five largest ethnic groups in Kingston are:

- White (Non-Hispanic) 65.9%.
- Black or African-American (Non-Hispanic) 17.8%.
- Hispanic 13.9%.
- Two or more races (Non-Hispanic) 10.8%.

Asian 1.9%

92.5% are U.S.citizens.

Describe how your Congregation is known/perceived by the larger community:

Past and present, our congregation has a reputation for being inclusive and politically progressive. Our congregation has a history of involvement in gay and lesbian rights, we are an affiliate of Ulster Immigration Defense Network (UIDN), we support Black Lives Matter and Women's Rights. We are theologically diverse. We are currently involved with several

community Racial Justice Organizations. The community is aware that we are involved in local justice issues.

UU Catskills hosts many cultural events, including numerous musical, theater, and artistic events. Our inclusion with the Interfaith Council has supported our reputation as a faith of progressive values.

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

We are liberal to very progressive politically, but we do not support political material or speeches at our services and meetings.

Our congregation is, for the most part, willing to give their minister freedom to speak from their own theological orientation. We have had ministers and speakers oriented toward Buddhism, Paganism, Pantheism, Christianity, Judaism, Atheism, etc. all welcomed to our pulpit.

As a congregation we make every effort to abide by our covenant(s). We are caring and supportive of each other, providing rides, helping with meals, making calls to those we haven't seen in a while, having house parties, etc. Because of the pandemic we have not done as much socializing as in the past, but our committee meetings, community circle meetings and the brief social time after the services are beginning to get us back in touch with each other.

We have experienced minor and major conflicts within the congregation, some between members and some between members and lay leadership and some between our minister, lay leaders and members. At times we have attempted to resolve these conflicts using our Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM), and recently we used the expertise of a Central East Region consultant to assist us. In the past we may not have addressed conflicts in a timely manner and now realize that not doing so could lead to a lack of communication and mistrust between all concerned.

Recently we had a minister abruptly leave our congregation. This could possibly have been avoided if issues that arose during her time with us were addressed at the moment. Fear of confrontation and lack of the necessary skills to approach the conflicts created a situation where everyone lost. We hope this never happens again, and with that in mind, several members of the congregation will be attending workshops on conflict resolution.

Position Basics

Anticipated Start Date: July 2023

Term: Two-year renewable

Percent Time: 50% Time

Minimum Salary + Housing: \$35,000

Benefits: Retirement Plan; UUA Health Plan; Disability Coverage; Term Life Insurance; Professional Expense Allowance

Questionnaire

Description of minister's role in relation to other paid staff

- To supervise and coordinate with them to find innovative and effective ways to communicate and implement tasks and programs
- To manage the administrative assistant
- To coordinate with the music director to prepare the services
- To manage and work with the RE director

Primary areas of focus for the minister

- To partner with the congregation and provide inspiring Sunday Services
- To provide pastoral care when called upon
- Assist us in rejuvenating our paused Capital Campaign

Traditional holiday services celebrated outside of Sunday morning

Thanksgiving, Passover, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Easter, Chalica

We have also celebrated Flower Communion, Water Communion, Day of the Dead, and Blessing of the Animals

Status of the congregation as a Welcoming Congregation

Yes, 2018

Status of the congregation as a Green Sanctuary congregation

No

Status of the congregation as an Honor Congregation

Yes

How the congregation defines good preaching and worship

We define good preaching and worship as a balance of head and heart, with inspiration that we can take with us into our own lives. We appreciate a diverse range of spiritual ideas and practical ways to live our UU Principles

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

In January 2022 our congregation received a \$20,000 grant from the Chalice Lighter (CL) Program of the Central East Region of the UUA to support investments in hybrid worship and outreach. The funds are being used in three areas.

1) Equipment for live streaming of hybrid services/programs.

Most of the equipment has been purchased. A storage cabinet to store and secure this equipment when not in use is being sought.

2) Sanctuary lighting.

A consultant with ties to our congregation has visited our sanctuary and has given very preliminary guidance on what is needed. The range of possibilities needs to be more focused. We hope to do so as the next step.

3) Membership/outreach program targeting people of all ages, particularly younger adults, throughout the region and beyond.

A consultant worked over a 4-month period to create our foundational digital marketing and internal communication strategy that included:

- developing a branded style guide, including brand essence and tone
- cleaning-up of existing website

- redesigning and shortening the newsletter and update guidelines
- redesigning the events calendar
- training of current employees and volunteers on social media guidelines

This foundational digital marketing strategy has improved the way we communicate with our existing membership, as well as how we tell our story to the broader community of who we are, the meaning of our principles and what is happening within our congregation.

It is anticipated that the work funded by the grant will be completed by June 2023.

The minister is expected to support this work and become familiar with the use of the new technology.