



More about the size of the stewardship increase...

I heard there is a 26% increase in the request for operating funds at OUUC this year! Why is the increase so big?

There are two main reasons for the higher stewardship request this year; one is philosophical and the other is rooted in social justice for our employees.

1. A shift in philosophy and strategy

The usual way the stewardship request has been determined at OUUC is to ask for as little as possible. Finance staff and volunteers, the minister, and the board spend weeks whittling away at the amount needed to run the congregation. Not surprisingly, there have been consequences. One is that we now find ourselves paying significantly below the market rate for our career staff - a problem that has become cumulative. We also aren't saving money in our reserve account to pay for future major maintenance and repairs. Were it not for a significant legacy gift, for example, we likely would have needed to borrow money to replace our obsolete heating systems. Our endowment funds would ideally be allowed to accumulate for major future expenses. Instead, we have been taking annual draws to pay for normal operating expenses. In short, the philosophy has been to ask the congregation to pledge as little as possible.

As with any strategy, there are positives and challenges, and while this strategy served OUUC for decades, the Board and Rev. Mary questioned whether this historical practice continues to serve the congregation.

This year we are asking for *the total amount* it costs to operate the church *without* an endowment draw or reserves, and significantly, make long-needed salary adjustments.

2. The budget prioritizes OUUC employees and adds staff to accommodate growth.

One-third of the increase in the operating budget for 2026-27 is increased costs for typical operating expenses. Two-thirds is for personnel costs.

We are a wonderfully growing congregation as people find us in challenging times. We want to keep doing what we do so well.

Due to demand, a second service was added in January 2025; Rev Mary is considering adding a third service with a different format and on a different day. And we need a third Christmas Eve service!

We have added staff since Covid to support multi-platform (Zoom and YouTube) worship and events; increased our administrative capacity and added a part-time

member engagement person to assist visitors, newcomers and long-term members. Now it is time to add ministry staff.

The proposed budget adds a .25 FTE assistant minister position. An assistant minister would help Rev. Mary with administration and pastoral care so she can help develop a third service, address growth, continue to help define how we make and share decisions, and allow her to offer the occasional class again.

Personnel costs reflect a 19.5% increase in health insurance premiums for 2026 and adds dental insurance for eligible employees.

The Board's Staff Compensation Task Force created last summer found entrenched inequities in staff compensation. The proposed budget reflects the cost of paying employees the salary commensurate with their job responsibilities and brings everyone up to at least the minimum rung of the UUA recommended salary range for their position. After some years of no cost-of-living increases while costs in our area have grown significantly, we have fallen behind in paying our staff a just and equitable wage. The budget also includes a cost-of-living increase.

Does that mean that I must increase my pledge by 26%?

There are several ways operating funds for OUUC can be increased. One way is that individuals increase the amount of their pledges. Another is that more people pledge. And one way is that we use other funds for operations.

In the past few years at OUUC, all three of these things have supported the operational budget. We have seen incredibly generous increases in pledges at all levels. Many more who participate in OUUC events and programs and who elect not to become members, are friends who financially support our work. We have added new members and friends each year. And, we have supplemented the operational budget with endowment and reserve funds.

If you can increase your pledge, it will be welcomed with gratitude.

If you participate in OUUC events or programs, please consider making a donation or pledge to support what you love.

If you are part of a group at OUUC, please talk about financial support for the congregation and encourage participation in the stewardship drive.

There are so many people seeking community right now. Invite those you encounter to join us for connecting and spiritual support as we work for a more loving, just and healthy world.

Thank you for your support of OUUC in all the ways you do so!