

Minister's Report 2015-2016
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

We have had a rich and busy first year together! This report does not cover everything that has happened, but I hope it offers a snapshot of what we have done in the past year to further the Mission and Ends of the congregation. This report is organized by the Ends Statements put together by the Board of Trustees. *End/Policy language is in italics.* Report Language is in plain text.

I. WITHIN

The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua is a spiritual home where members and friends experience personal transformation by:

- *Participating in varied and meaningful common worship that nurtures, challenges, and inspires*

2015 Summer Services were a great success, with an average of 64 in attendance each week, including an average of 3 visitors. The addition of paid musicians for summer services to the budget was much appreciated by the summer worship leaders and attendees alike.

Starting in September, we began using monthly worship themes. Our themes come from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle, a group of over 100 congregations that share resources each month around common themes. The themes have been well received this year, even by some who were skeptics at first. Throughout the year, people organically began to engage with the themes in other areas of church life as well (including Stewardship and Adult Faith Formation).

Our average Sunday attendance this year was 197, with combined worship and Faith Formation attendance. Our two Christmas Eve services had a combined attendance of 322.

We held two Vespers services this year, one on Ancestry (20 in attendance) and one on Black Lives Matter (45 in attendance). The desire was expressed for more evening services in the future, so next year, we'll be experimenting with "Body & Soul" – a potluck dinner followed by a worship service on the second Sunday of each month.

One of the things we thought intentionally about this year was worship for and with children and youth. We've held 6 Whole Church Services so far this year (with a seventh coming up in June), including an outdoor Blessing of the Animals. Sandra Greenfield, our IDFF, was my partner in planning all of the Whole Church Services, and offered many Stories for All Ages throughout the year. The RE Team created Worship Kits available to anyone who needs to draw or fiddle to help pay attention during the service. Once-a-month Children's Chapels began in January and ran through May. Worship Associates worked with Sandra, to plan and put on these services.

The Music Program has continued to flourish this year under the leadership of Jed Holland and the Music Team. Jed attended Worship Associate meetings and I attended Music Team meetings in order to aide communication and collaboration. We added 70 "Singing the Journey" hymnals to our collection and have had a wide variety of guest musicians play throughout the year. The

Music Team has also been talking about licensing, and ways for the Music Program to be more involved with Children's Chapel and evening services.

Certainly a highlight of the year was my Installation Service on April 10. A team of many volunteers made it a well-organized, beautiful and meaningful event. My colleagues are still talking about the incredible flash mob!

- *Exploring religious values and discovering individual truths*

The biggest change this year in religious education was our shift to using the language of Faith Formation to talk about our programming. This language acknowledges the way in which our programs are actually much broader than education. Faith Formation is a more holistic way of talking about what we do here, encompassing education, spiritual development, identity formation and more.

Sandra Greenfield has adeptly led our Faith Formation programs this year, first as our Interim Director of Lifespan Religious Education and now as our Interim Director of Faith Formation. She will spend one more year with us. During the next year, we will be searching for a settled Director of Faith Formation. The Search Team for this position includes: Pat Ladew (chair), Erica Agnew (Youth Rep), Cecile Bonvouloir, Peggy Cardone, Dan Earley, and Kathy Fletcher.

Children's & Youth Faith Formation had a total enrollment of 101 this year, with an especially large Our Whole Lives class of 23 7th & 8th graders. This is almost a 25% increase in enrollment from last year.

The Children's & Youth Faith Formation Team has been engaging in visioning work this year as part of the interim process. They attended an RE Start Up workshop with me and Sandra in January, and held an all-day retreat in April.

Adult Faith Formation began the year with little to no infrastructure. Nonetheless, we held various programs throughout the year: a Restorative Circles Workshop; a monthly Rowley Discussion Group (average of 9 participants); a series of T-UU-sday offerings, on Tuesday nights from January to May (average of 7 participants); The Wi\$dom Path (12 participants total); and a trip to Boston for a Minns Lecture (10 participants).

After church activities on Sundays have included Intro to UU, Deeper than Coffee, a drop-in Covenant Group and PercUUlate (a conversation with the minister about an area of church life).

Covenant Groups continued this year, with 5 active groups. The Facilitators met monthly with Sandra and myself, and led a service in January. Three of us attended a Small Group Ministry Workshop in November.

I have been holding a monthly small group service at The Huntington since December. Laurie Goodman and Sandra have both helped in one or more of these. We have had 9-16 residents attend each session.

Sandra and I held an Adult Spiritual Development Retreat in January to begin planning for the future of that program. 16 people participated. Sandra will be meeting with an Adult Faith Formation Start-Up Team for the first time in June.

I facilitated a visioning session for the Young Adult Group on 3/22. 7 YAs attended. They are moving forward with plans for more frequent meetings, more structure and new leadership next year.

- *Joining in fellowship with other members and friends.*

The Social Activities wing of the Membership Committee hosted several events last summer, helping to keep people connected over the summer months, as well as a very successful Welcome Back Breakfast on September 13. The also hosted a Halloween Party, and a Contra Dance in January. Peggy Cardone organized a very successful post-service Egg Hunt on Easter.

The Youth Group has been holding monthly Pancake Breakfasts on the first Sunday of the month. In an effort to further bring people together over food, a donation was made to pilot having food at coffee hour. We have been experimenting with this throughout the Spring.

There was outdoor fellowship in plenty this year. Over 20 members went to Cardigan Mountain on March 4-6. The UU Hikers were active throughout the year, and experimented with some different timing and variety in their hikes.

II. AMONG

The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua is a welcoming religious community for all ages where we live our mission by:

- *Creating a beloved community where we minister to one another*

The Pastoral Care Team has been working this year to clarify their role in the congregation, raise their visibility, and figure out systems for tracking needs and follow-up. They have added a “Caring Community” component to their work, which will help members with meals, rides, etc. in times of need. Jenn Morton has stepped up to head this branch of the PCT.

The Pastoral Care Team also sponsored a workshop on February 27 called “Listening in the Service of Healing,” led by Aaron Pawelek, of the New England Pastoral Institute. 25 people attended, including 3 members of the Chelmsford congregation.

- *Supporting and respecting one another in our daily lives and our religious journeys*

In July, the Team who has been working on the Covenant of Right Relations held a program about how to use the Covenant “on the ground.” The desire for more such sessions was noted. We have been speaking the words of the Covenant together in worship services this year (on a rotating basis with the Mission). I have heard it come up organically in many conversations as well, which tells me that folks are beginning to integrate it into their daily interactions in the

congregation. This work around conflict and covenant will be a continued growing edge for the congregation in the years to come.

On October 16-18, the Spiritual Development Team hosted a workshop on Restorative Circles. Nine members of the congregation attended the full weekend, along with 15-20 folks from other congregations. A Restorative Circles Team has formed as a result of that training. They hosted Reflective Listening practice sessions every second Tuesday from January through May. They will be regrouping this summer to figure out next steps.

I held a PercUulate conversation on Theological Diversity on April 24. 15 people attended and had a lively conversation. This is another area in which I believe the congregation has potential to grow further in the years to come.

- *Generously giving of our time, talents, and money*

A new Leadership Development Team split off from the Nominating Committee to nurture connection among current UUCN leaders and foster new leadership. They report to the Minister and will be focused on the non-elected leadership roles in the congregation. Pat Ladew served as chair of this new Team. They held two Leadership Summits, one in October and one in April. The October Summit was a partnership with the PR Team, and the April Summit was a collaboration with the RE Team. The Leadership Development Team also worked with the Property Team to help strengthen that team, began putting together a manual for Team and Committee Chairs, and helped staff to strategize recruitment of volunteers.

Harry Purkhiser stepped up this year to lead our Stewardship Team. He and his team led a very successful Stewardship Campaign with the theme of "Saying Yes." This year we raised \$313,476.67 from 172 pledge units. This is nearly a 10% increase from last year's total. Thank you all for your generosity!

The Stewardship Team also worked with Mike Wilt and the Web Team to implement online pledging and payments. We hope this will continue to make it easy to pledge. There are plans to expand this capability to the Outreach Offering in the coming year.

The Church Auction was overall a huge success, thanks to fabulous work by Jenn Morton, Michelle Morrison and Kate O'Shea. We raised over \$10,000 and had many new folks participating. Jenn, Michelle and Kate have made recommendations for improvement for next year, especially improving storage and the accounting system.

An anonymous donor paid for new choral risers to be built for the sanctuary. The Music Team has been working on this possibility for a couple of years now, as the old riser was too small and increasingly dangerous given the size of the choir. The new risers are a beautiful addition to our sanctuary.

- *Being good stewards of our church resources in pursuit of our mission.*

The Property Team had its hands full this year, creating the new DFF office space and Resource Room. If you haven't checked out the Resource Room yet, you should! It's a beautiful space, and the staff has been grateful for both the storage and meeting space it provides. We have to extend our gratitude to Sandy Martinage, our Sexton, who went above and beyond in coordinating this project. Nona Storer headed up a sub-committee of Property to come up with plans for re-doing the Fellowship Room. Though we are not moving forward with this project at the moment, we hope to incorporate these plans in planning for major renovations over the next five years.

I worked with a Strategic Advisory Team to help with the development of a 5-year plan for the congregation. The Team consisted of Gary Lerude, John Sanders, Mary Merkel and Gillian Hinkle, Sandra Greenfield and myself. Our 5-year Strategic Plan will be released online and introduced on the day of the Annual Meeting.

Another new team this year was the Shared Ministry Team (Carol Houde, Steve Ladew, Brenna Woods and Cecile Bonvouloir). They are responsible for considering the shared ministry of the congregation, and providing some linkage for me. They will be the other body (besides the Board) who will be evaluating me for my Fellowship renewal this year and next year.

The Personnel Team did a tremendous amount of work this year, creating new job descriptions, revising old ones, revising the Personnel Manual and creating evaluation forms for our yearly staff evaluations.

We had some staff changes this year. Lori Lerude began in June as our Membership Coordinator; Sandra Greenfield began in August as our Interim Director of Lifespan Religious Education (now Interim Director of Faith Formation) and I began in August as your settled Minister. In January, Lori Bonnette came on as a very part-time Bookkeeper, as the operational duties for finances shifted to staff. We have had two Lead Baby/Toddler Caregivers, Casey Apfelberg from October 2015-February 2016; and Lisa Morel, who began in March.

With our continuing staff (Sherri Woolsey, Jed Holland, and Sandy Martinage) we have had a strong staff team this year. We began the year with a Staff Retreat in August and have met weekly throughout the year for information-sharing, support and collaboration. I am grateful to have such wonderful partners in this work!

We have a couple changes on the horizon for next year in terms of staffing. The people will stay the same, but some hours and responsibilities will change. The Personnel Team has re-organized and revised our Administrator and Sexton job descriptions for 2016-2017. Sherri will be promoted from an Office Administrator to a Church Administrator. In large part, this is an acknowledgement of the new tasks she has taken on this year in financial management, HR and website management. The new task she will add to this next year is facilities management, and supervising our Sexton. Sandy will be doing less administrative work in her revised position. Sherri will have slightly more hours and Sandy will have slightly fewer.

Both Lori L. and Lori B. will also have some hours added to their contracts for next year (Lori L. will go from 10 to 15 hours per week; Lori B. from 3 to 4 hours per week). Their responsibilities will not change. The change in hours is a recognition of how much time it actually takes to fulfill the duties in their job descriptions.

This year we applied for official 501c3 status from the IRS. We had been grandfathered in as a church that has been around for longer than the status has existed; however, we were not able to take advantage of some of the resources available to official 501c3 organizations. Many thanks to Sherri Woolsey for taking care of the tremendous amount of paperwork the application requires. We are now waiting to hear back.

III. BEYOND

The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua is a beacon of liberal religious thought and action, making a positive impact in our neighborhood and in the world by:

- *Promoting our values and programs so that others will hear our voice and have the opportunity to join us*

The PR Team installed a beautiful new sign over the summer, giving us greater visibility from the road. They also worked to get press coverage a couple of times this year, and aired the video of my installation on Public Access TV in May.

The Cemetery Association/Membership Team held a hugely successful set of tours on October 10, with 72 people attending. Kudos to the planners: June Haskell, Lorraine Arlan and Monica Staples; and to the group that put together the fantastic video on church history: Bob Sampson, Gary Lerude and Dan Murphy. There is a hope to have more such tours in the future.

A small contingent from the congregation marched with our banner in the Nashua Fall Festival parade. I hope we may find more ways to be out in the community as a congregation in the future.

- *Welcoming people who are seeking a spiritual home and personal transformation*

With a new Membership and Volunteer Coordinator and a new minister, the process for becoming a member was re-visioned this year. We asked everyone to take both an “Intro to UU” class and a new “Membership Class,” in addition to meeting one-on-one with the minister and Membership Coordinator. We welcomed 16 new members and 8 children and youth into our congregation on November 22; and 16 new members and 3 children and youth on May 22. The grand total for the year was 32 new members and 11 children and youth. Each recognition ceremony was preceded by a New Member Reception the night before hosted by the Membership Team at my home.

Lori L. also worked hard this year to put in place new ways to capture information about visitors and track their progression from visitor to regular attender to member. The post-church programs like “Intro to UU” and “Deeper than Coffee” proved to be good ways to help new visitors start to feel connected.

- *Partnering with other congregations and institutions in advocating for and promoting social justice*

The Social Justice Team experimented with some restructuring this year, that will likely continue through next year or longer. As part of this, they held several Social Justice Forums to highlight the work that is being done in our congregation and in the community.

The Outreach Offerings continued to be highly successful this year. We gave away over \$40,000 to 9 different organizations. On October 25, we had a fabulous multigenerational event to decorate and assemble the Sweet Cases that had been purchased with the money from our summer offerings.

39 people from our congregation participated in the CROP Walk on November 1. It was a wonderful chance to raise money for a good cause and participate in our local interfaith community.

A group of women from the church sent me a letter in the fall urging the congregation to begin a conversation around Black Lives Matter and perhaps to display a banner. As a result, a Black Lives Matter Working Group was formed. So far, they have held a Vespers service, a 3-part book discussion on “The New Jim Crow” and are planning a summer service. In April, I attended a three-day conference in NYC along with Harry Purkhiser on building multiracial, multicultural faith communities.

I participated in the Nashua Area Interfaith Council Thanksgiving Service on November 24. I hope next year we can do a better job of advertising this and get a few more UUCN folks to attend the service.

- *Actively participating in regional (Northern New England District) and national (Unitarian Universalist Association) Unitarian Universalist programs and activities.*

I have attended cluster meeting and both the Northern New England Ministers retreats this year. I am grateful for the supportive community of colleagues in New Hampshire.

Different groups in the congregation have attended five separate New England Region workshops this year. All have come back with energy and useful information. Nine people from UUCN attended the Northern New England District Annual Meeting on April 9, including two folks who presented on panel. At that meeting, I was elected to serve a three-year term as Northern New England District Secretary. One of my hopes is that this role will help the congregation stay connected to the district.

We have five people lined up to be on-site delegates for General Assembly in Columbus, OH this June: Ellen Barr, Seth Bonvouloir, Jeanne Hochstetler, David Hudson, and Lori Lerude. I will also be attending. The delegates will present a summer service on July 17. The Youth Group has been fundraising for several months now with the hope of attending GA 2017 as a group.

Sandra and I have begun talking with the ministers from the Milford and Manchester congregations about possible collaboration on Adult Faith Formation for next year.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Allison Palm