

Minister's Report 2016-2017
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

I am grateful for all we have done together this year. In our first year of our five-year Strategic Plan, we have accomplished a lot! 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*

Our Summer Services continue to grow. Our 2016 Summer Services had an average of 71 in attendance each week, compared to an average of 64 in 2015. We once again had a wide variety of worship leaders from within the congregation.

We continued with our monthly themes for worship this year, exploring everything from Presence to Transformation to Zest! Our Children's Chapel services explored the same themes, and our Adult Faith Formation programming had several theme-based offerings.

Our average Sunday attendance this year was 186, with combined worship and Faith Formation attendance. Our two Christmas Eve services had a combined attendance of 281.

We made two notable changes to enhance our Sunday morning worship this year. After much research and deliberation, our AV Team installed a screen in the sanctuary to allow for easier-to-read slides, and the use of pictures and videos in our worship services. We also have switched our Joys and Sorrows from spoken to written "Candles Cards." This has helped that part of the service flow smoothly and kept our services on track time-wise. We'll switch back to spoken Joys and Sorrows for our summer services this year, when we have a smaller, more intimate crowd. Candles Cards will return again in the fall.

One experiment this year was our once-a-month Sunday evening "Body & Soul" services. These services morphed as the year went by, beginning in the Auditorium and ending up in the Chapel, which offered a more intimate sacred space. The goal of these services was to provide an alternative worship experience (smaller, participatory worship) at an alternative time. Each service was followed by a shared meal. We had an average of 17 people at the Body & Soul services. The Worship Associates will be evaluating this experiment at our June gathering.

Our Music Program continues to be an important part of the Sunday morning worship experience. I attend Music Team meetings each month in order to aide communication and collaboration. Thanks to a generous donation, we now have a full set of "Singing the Journey" hymnals, and we continue to expand our hymn and anthem repertoire.

- *Exploring religious values and discovering individual truths*

Our biggest news in Faith Formation this year is that we have hired a new settled Director of Faith Formation. Sadie Kahn-Greene is a Credentialed Religious Educator with 13+ years of experience with UU Faith Formation. She will begin her work with us on July 24. I am especially grateful to the DFF Search Team: Pat Ladew (chair), Erica Agnew (Youth Rep), Cecile Bonvouloir, Peggy Cardone, Dan Earley, and Kathy Fletcher, for their role in the hiring process. This Team worked tirelessly from August to April to gather input from the congregation, advertise the position, and conduct two rounds of interviews with candidates.

With our settled DFF about to come on board, we are also beginning to say our farewells to Sandra Greenfield, who has served adeptly as our Interim Director of Faith Formation for the past two years. I am grateful for all that she has done to help our Faith Formation program thrive in this time of transition. We will be celebrating Sandra and saying goodbye at our service and picnic on June 11. She will remain with us through July 31, ensuring our transition to a settled DFF goes smoothly.

Children's & Youth Faith Formation had a total enrollment of 74 this year, with an especially large ROPEs class of 20 teens.

The Children's & Youth Faith Formation Team tried a new way of organizing themselves this year, designating liaisons to other major teams to foster increased collaboration and communication. As a result, they worked with Community Dinners, the Stewardship Team, the Pastoral Care Team, the Black Lives Matter Team and more.

Our Adult Faith Formation Team has been very active this year. As a new team, that just came together at the end of last church year, they nonetheless offered many opportunities for adults to learn, explore and deepen together. Our TUUsday programs continued this year, as did our Covenant Groups (with 6 active groups). There have also been numerous one-time offerings, and multi-week workshops. Laurie Goodman and I have continued to hold a monthly small group service at the Huntington, with a steady group of 9-11 residents. And, our Young Adult Group has grown, sometimes attracting as many as 9 young adults on a Sunday evening.

We also piloted a collaboration with the Milford and Manchester churches this year for Adult Faith Formation. We are looking forward to continuing this collaboration in upcoming years.

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

Our Youth Group has continued holding monthly Pancake Breakfasts on the first Sunday of the month this year, a combination fundraiser for their GA trip and opportunity for folks to gather and socialize before the service.

Our UU Outdoors group keeps going strong, expanding from simply hiking to offering other outdoor activities such as biking and kayaking.

Our Stewardship Team hosted a series of dinners in January which were very well attended. And, of course, our Annual Service Auction was a great opportunity for fellowship and fun (as well as raising money!).

One of the things I think we could use more of at UU Nashua is fun and fellowship. I hope to foster more of this in the next church year.

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*

Our Pastoral Care Team began the year with a training to ground their work. They have taken on more visiting and reaching out to members this year. We have created a “buddy” system, where particular members of the PCT have been paired with particular members who could use someone checking in regularly. I hope this will help folks who can’t make it to church anymore continue to feel connected to the community.

Although we do not currently have an active, organized “Caring Community” branch of our Pastoral Care Team, I am heartened to see members of the congregation organically stepping up to care for one another in moments of need. This is a deeply caring congregation. The PCT is working on a comprehensive list of resources in our area, which we hope will aid us as we work with folks in the congregation who are going through particular challenges.

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

Our work around covenant continues. This year, our Shared Ministry Team led four PercUUlate sessions on different parts of the covenant, all of which were well attended. We explored what different part of the covenant mean and how to live in to them. I continue to observe that this congregation struggles with direct communication and being in conflict. I hope we keep learning and growing together in this area.

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

Our Leadership Development Team continues to do good work in pulling together the leaders in the church for communication and learning. They held four events this year, all of which were well attended. The Leadership Development Team and I have begun talking about the purpose of the Team and what leadership ought to look like at UU Nashua.

Elizabeth Lewis stepped up this year to lead our Stewardship Team. The Team led a successful Stewardship Campaign with the theme of “Building Together.” This year we raised \$331,233.50 from 158 pledge units. This is nearly a \$20,000 increase from last year’s total. Thank you all for your generosity!

The Church Auction was overall a success, thanks to fabulous work by Mary Beth Restivo, Jess Woods, Steve Ladew, Matt Girouard and many others. We raised nearly \$10,000 and had many

new folks participating. This year we had an all services Auction (no goods) which cut down greatly on the work and the storage issues we have had in previous years.

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

The Property Team has done a thorough assessment this year of projects that need to get done in the next 5 years or so. You may not be surprised to hear that this is a big list! I have started talking with the Board and Stewardship Team about what it would be like for us to run a Capital Campaign in the next 5 years.

The Safe Congregation Task Force (Victoria Agnew, Sandra Greenfield, Sharon Machado, Ellen McCormick, Andy Straussberg, Sherri Woolsey and myself) submitted both an initial and a finished Safe Congregation Policy to the Board this year for approval. The final version was approved in April and is up on our website in the “Governance” section.

We’ve had all kinds of activity in communications this year. We launched a re-designed web site in December, which we hope facilitates easier access to information about the church. We also transitioned our weekly newsletter to be focused on brief announcements rather than articles, so it is a little easier to digest and find what you need to know. In addition, I have been creating weekly announcement videos every Tuesday to offer another mode of finding out what is going on, for those who prefer to listen rather than read. Last, but not least, our AV and PR Teams are merging into one Communications Team, which is meeting for the first time at the end of May.

Our staff has remained the same throughout the year, and continues to be a strong team. We began the year with a retreat, getting ourselves ready for the year and setting goals based on our Strategic Plan. We have a couple changes on the horizon for next year in terms of staffing. As mentioned above, Sadie Kahn-Greene will begin as our settled Director of Faith Formation on July 24, and Sandra Greenfield will finish her time with us on July 31. Jed Holland, our Music Director, will begin working for us year-round starting July 1. Sandy Martinage, our Sexton, will get a few more hours in the summer months bringing her up to 25 hours a week year-round.

We received our official 501c3 status in August, thanks to Sherri’s hard work!

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 began airing sermons weekly on Nashua public access television. They also continue to advertise in the Nashua Telegraph each week. We got a brief article in the telegraph when we raised our Black Lives Matter banner in February.

Our new website was the other big promotional project of the year. Sherri has been training Team leaders on the website so we can keep the content fresh and new. This is an ongoing effort.

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

Once again, we held two New Member Welcome Ceremonies this year. We welcomed 6 new members into our congregation in November; and 12 new members in April. The grand total for the year was 18 new members. Each recognition ceremony was preceded by a New Member Reception the night before hosted by the Membership Team.

We also added two new opportunities for newcomers to learn about UU Nashua: a “Welcome to UUCN” session that gives an overview of four major program areas in the church: Worship/Music, Faith Formation, Social Justice and Pastoral Care; and a brief tour of the church.

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

The Social Justice Leadership Team has settled on a structure that they have been trying out for a couple months. This includes a Leadership Team with representatives from the different projects we are working on. Currently represented on the Team are Community Dinners/NSKS, Black Live Matter, Granite State Organizing Project, Outreach Offering Team, and UU Action NH (our state advocacy network).

Social Justice has been busy this year. Most notably, we launched a church-wide focus on Racial Justice in January, spearheaded by our Black Lives Matter Team. The Team has led a number of educational efforts throughout the year, and has begun forming partnerships with the Nashua NAACP, My Brother’s Keeper in Nashua, Black Lives Matter Manchester, and the Nashua Community Conversation on Race and Justice. The BLM Team is planning a retreat this summer to determine programming and direction for next year.

In January, 8 people from UU Nashua attended the organizing meeting for UU Action NH, a new organization devoted to organizing UUs from across NH to work for our values at the state level. In April, the Social Justice Team voted to become official members of UU Action NH. Livia Gershon O’Neil will be our representative on their Congregational Council.

The Outreach Offerings continued to be highly successful this year. So far, we have given away \$35,000 to 9 different organizations. In addition, we did a couple of special collections at events for Black Lives Matter Boston, and for UU Action NH.

35+ people from our congregation participated in the CROP Walk in October. It was a wonderful chance to raise money for a good cause and participate in our local interfaith community.

We hosted the Nashua Area Interfaith Council Thanksgiving Service in November, and had good attendance from members of the congregation. We also had a large number of choir members who participated in the Interfaith Choir for that service. The Interfaith Choir (a collaboration of Main Street Methodist, Temple Beth Abraham, New Fellowship Baptist and UU Nashua) performed 4 times at community events this year. Jed Holland has been one of the leaders and organizers of this choir.

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

I have continued to attend ministers' cluster meetings 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 New England Regional Assembly on April 21-22, including six delegates who stayed for the Northern New England District Annual Meeting at the end of the Regional Assembly. I continue to serve as Northern New England District Secretary.

We have four people lined up to be on-site delegates and two to be off-site delegates for General Assembly in New Orleans, LA this June: Ellen Barr (off-site), Seth Bonvouloir, David Hudson, Mary Licking (off-site), Gail McMorrow Donahue and Art Reublinger. Sandra and I will also be attending, along with 9 youth and 3 adults from our Youth Group. The Youth Group has been fundraising for a year and a half for this opportunity and are very excited to experience GA. The GA attendees will present a summer service on July 16.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Allison Palm