

Minister's Report 2017-2018
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

Once again, we have had a full year! I am writing this report in mid-April, as I prepare for my 12-week parental leave. As you read it in May or June, I am sure there is even more to add to our story of this year. As usual, 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 steadily attract around 60 people. In summer 2017, we had a wide variety of worship leaders from within the congregation. I led two of the twelve services. The summer services offer a great opportunity for us to hear from different voices and perspectives, and are appreciated by all who attend. This was the first summer that Jed Holland, our Music Director was a full-year employee. It was helpful to have his steady presence at most of the summer services.

We continued with our monthly themes for worship this year, exploring everything from Courage to Balance to Creativity. Our Children's Chapel services have continued to explore the same themes, and we are beginning to integrate the themes into our Faith Formation programs as well. This year, our Neighboring Faiths class used a curriculum called "Crossing Paths" that explored different faiths related to the theme of the month.

Our average Sunday attendance this year was 170, with combined worship and Faith Formation attendance. Our two Christmas Eve services had a combined attendance of 348.

Our Worship Associates continue to thrive. This year we had nine Worship Associates, including two youth. I work with the Worship Associates to brainstorm around each month's theme and choose topics for the services. Often, the Worship Associates lead the entire service on my Sunday off each month. They also help to organize summer services and host our guest preachers.

I am excited that the congregation will be having four guest preachers while I am on Parental Leave. I think it is so valuable to bring in these outside voices. We had an additional guest in the fall, and I participated in two pulpit swaps which brought the ministers from Manchester and Milford to lead worship here in Nashua.

We have tried to offer many different styles of worship this year, including services with multiple reflections, a sermon dialogue, services with ritual elements, and services with a

traditional sermon. Sadie Kahn-Greene and I have collaborated on All Ages services, and have offered one nearly every month this year.

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. Our choir and soloists continue to offer excellent music that complements the theme and tone of the services. This year we have experimented with having an occasional All Ages Choir, open to anyone who wants to join in for a given Sunday. We have also started to have a band Sunday nearly once a month during the church year.

- *Exploring religious values and discovering individual truths*

This year was our first with our settled Director of Faith Formation, Sadie Kahn-Greene. Sadie began at the end of July, and we are so grateful she is with us! We also had turnover in our childcare position this year, as we said goodbye to Lisa Morel, our Lead Child Caregiver, this fall. In February, Ericka Lavalley joined our staff in the newly-titled position of Faith Formation Assistant, offering Sunday morning support to our Faith Formation programs, as well as childcare for our littlest ones, as needed.

Children & Youth Faith Formation had a total enrollment of 72 this year. Most Sundays, children and youth split up into 6 age groups: Pre-K/K, 1st & 2nd Grade, 3rd & 4th Grade, 5th & 6th Grade, Our Whole Lives (7th & 8th Grade), and Senior High Youth Group (met on Sunday evenings). As usual, each group was led by 3-5 wonderful adult volunteers. The children and youth also had four Sundays with All Ages programming, known as AREA Sundays.

We had numerous Adult Faith Formation programs this year, including Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, a three-part book discussion on “The Third Reconstruction,” Owing Your Religious Past, End of Life Planning, and a monthly series of conversations on race led by the Black Lives Matter Team. In addition, we had nine Covenant Groups this year, with more than 50 members involved, and held monthly drop-in Deeper Than Coffee conversations. I continued leading a monthly small group at the Huntington, with the support of our Worship Associates, and our Young Adult Group met twice a month throughout the year. We continue to work with the Manchester and Milford congregations to cross-promote and collaborate on Adult Faith Formation.

This year, Sadie, Jed and I led two All Ages Saturday evening events, with a time for an activity all together, followed by a potluck, and an hour of separate programming for kids and parents. One was a Carol Sing; the other was a Chalice Activity Hour. Both events were well received and we hope to do more such events next year.

Both the Children & Youth and the Adult Faith Formation Teams have been experimenting with a new way of organizing this spring. Rather than having one big team that meets once a month, they have split up into small task teams, that focus on a particular area of Faith Formation and meet as needed.

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

We started off the year with a picnic to welcome Sadie and kick off the church year. We plan to hold another picnic after the final service of the church year to offer another opportunity for fellowship before summer.

Our Youth Group has held a few Pancake Breakfasts before the service, again combining fundraising for a cause (Hurricane relief for Puerto Rico) and a Sunday morning fellowship time.

Our UU Hikers have continued to schedule regular hikes, though this winter/spring has been a tough one weather-wise.

We have had a few other one-time fellowship events, but I once again end the year feeling that we could use more fun and fellowship at UU Nashua. If anyone is interested in helping to make this happen, please let me know.

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 once again began the year with a training to ground their work. They continue to “buddy” with church members who need ongoing support, and to reach out to those who have more immediate needs. The PCT is stepping up while I am away, with one person designated to be on call during each week of my leave. They will be supported by Rev. Barbara McKusick Liscord, who will offer professional pastoral care as needed.

I continue to be grateful for the ways in which this congregation steps up – both in organized ways and organically – to care for one another. I know that this community is one in which people feel cared for and supported in the challenging times in their lives.

One new pastoral care initiative this year has been a monthly drop-in Grief Group, led by Pastoral Care Team member Karen Campbell. I am grateful to be able to offer such a space to those in our congregation who are grieving.

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

Our Shared Ministry Team continued to explore conflict and covenant this year. It seems that our Covenant of Right Relationship has helped some in figuring out how we relate to one another, but perhaps does not go deep enough. I know that the covenant was developed by a small number of people in the congregation, and I would like to do more work as a congregation in thinking about covenant and conflict, how those two things relate, and what role they have in our congregation. I hope to begin some of this work next year, and I know this will be ongoing work for us, as it involves deep cultural work, which will be neither easy nor straightforward.

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

Our Leadership Development Team held two successful Connections Summits this year. They shifted the focus for these summits from “leadership” to “connections” to welcome in all church members, even those who do not see themselves in leadership roles.

Volunteer time and recruitment continues to be something of a struggle. This is a common theme in many congregations. The staff and I have been exploring together and individually ideas for how we can rethink the way we do leadership and volunteering at the church so that it can fit into people’s lives in a meaningful way. This will be an area of continued exploration in the year to come.

Elizabeth Lewis and Jess Woods led our Stewardship Team this year, with a campaign theme of “Sustaining Our Vision. So far, we have raised over \$323,000 from 175 pledge units. Thank you all for your generosity!

The Stewardship Team has also begun to talk with folks about legacy giving, specifically linked at this time to the Wake Now Our Vision matching campaign being run by the UUA. We hope that many people will be interested in thinking about putting the church in their will, given the promise of a 10% cash match in the next couple of years.

Our Church Auction is coming up on May 5, and looks to be a wonderful event!

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

We ended last fiscal year with a \$40,000 surplus, mostly due to unexpected income. The Board voted to put \$25,000 of this surplus into our Building Maintenance Fund, which is used when large or unexpected building maintenance issues arise.

This was our first full year of implementing our Safe Congregation Policy. We trained over 50 people on the policy in the fall, and have been learning as we go about what it takes to fully implement the policy. So far, the policy has been working well, and it is helpful to have the boundaries spelled out in this way.

This was our first year of having a Communications Team (previously split into AV and PR). The Team has spent the year sorting out their tasks and beginning to work on communications policies and procedures.

One big administrative project this year has been researching our database options and selecting a new database for the church. Sherri and I worked with a small group of congregants to gather information from database users and investigate the various options. We chose Breeze Church Management System, and will be transitioning all our data to this system in late June and early July. The staff are particularly excited for the increased functionality that this new system will offer.

The Property Team has been focusing on putting together a 20-year maintenance plan this year, so that we will be able to anticipate our regular maintenance needs. This is a big project! They

have also been focusing on landscaping and heating issues. They will be getting a comprehensive energy audit done in the coming months, which will help us think about next steps for our buildings.

We have had a number of staff transitions this year. As mentioned above, Sadie Kahn-Greene started as our settled Director of Faith Formation in July, and we have a new Faith Formation Assistant, Ericka Lavalley, as of February. Lori Lerude's role as our Membership Coordinator ended in November after two years of serving in that position. The rest of the staff stepped up to fill in pieces of that role for the next 4 ½ months. This included adding an extra 5 hours a week to Sherri Woolsey's position, bringing her to 35 hours a week. I worked with our Membership Team co-chairs, Laurie Goodman and Karen Thomas, to hire an Acting Membership Coordinator, Molly Yarrington, who began her work with us in early March. Her position is a 16-month contract, with an option to renew. Next year, we will be discerning what we want to do with this position moving forward.

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*

We have been putting more effort into our Facebook page this year, including paying to boost some posts so that more people will see them. We have almost 500 people who "Like" our page – and hope to surpass 500 soon.

I have had a public role in a few different community events this year, including offering opening words at the Nashua Inauguration, Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast, and Nashua March for Our Lives.

I would like us to do more in this area. As UUs, we often shy away from anything that might feel like evangelizing, and yet, we also know that we have an important message to share with the world. I hope this will be an area in which we can grow in the coming years.

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

We held one New Member Welcome Ceremony this year in March, and welcomed 15 new members. We also continued our regular Intro to UU classes, and our Exploring Membership sessions.

Our Membership Team stepped up their Greeter program this year, having one person from the team there each week to act as a Lead Greeter. We continue to grow in our ability to be welcoming as a congregation. I am always grateful to hear from newcomers that they felt welcomed when they came here, and I know that this is not the universal experience.

With the staff transition in Membership this year, a lot of this work got put on hold. Now that we have someone back in this position, there are new ideas and energy around membership, which should serve us well in the coming year.

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

We have done a lot around social justice this year!

Our Black Lives Matter Team began with a retreat in July to set goals for the year. Throughout the year, the team has held monthly conversations around race. We have also held four worship services centered on issues of racial justice. The BLM Team has continued to nurture partnerships in the community with black-led organizations and organizations that are working on racial justice. In April, our Outreach Offering is going to support Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism.

One big project of the BLM Team this year was the work of the Jeffrey Campbell Study Group. This group spent the last year researching the lives of Jeffrey and Marguerite Campbell, two black Unitarian Universalist professionals who grew up in the Nashua Universalist church and faced racism and discrimination throughout their lives as they sought to serve our faith. We presented a service on their lives on Feb. 11. The service was repeated on April 8 in Brattleboro, where Jeffrey Campbell served as a part-time minister. We received the blessing of Jeffrey Campbell's daughters to put up a marker on the unmarked grave where Jeffrey and Marguerite are buried here in Nashua, and raised over \$4000 for this project. We will have a ceremony to dedicate the new grave marker in September.

Our connection with the Granite State Organizing Project has led us into work with the New Hampshire Immigration Solidarity Network, established this fall by GSOP and others. We officially joined the network in the fall. I and others have been attending many of the Immigrant Solidarity Vigils that are being held at least once a month at the Federal Building in Manchester to offer witness and accompaniment to the immigrants who have to check in with ICE. We did a service on Immigration in January, and have held a few conversations with members of the congregation about how we might get more involved in the immigrant solidarity work, in addition to hosting an Immigration 101 workshop at the Nashua Public Library in March. A small group has been in conversation with the Manchester UU congregation, which has voted to be a physical sanctuary, about how we can support them. They are putting together a resolution for our Annual Meeting to vote on our congregation officially pledging support as a Level 2 sanctuary church (meaning that we would support the Manchester church should they choose to house someone).

Our work with GSOP was strengthened in two additional ways this year. I attended a PICO National Clergy Summit in Indianapolis at the end of October as part of the GSOP delegation, and our congregation hosted the GSOP Annual Meeting on Nov. 12.

We organized a group to attend the Nashua March for Our Lives on March 24. Many people from the congregation were there.

Our Community Dinners continue to be well attended and appreciated. This year has involved some reorganizing and cultivating of new leaders to keep the dinners going. Our hope for next year is to continue to pull new people into this work. Once again, our children created care packages for Community Dinner guests in December.

So far this year, we have given away over \$26,000 through our weekly Outreach Offerings.

We continue to be active in the Nashua Area Interfaith Council. I have been serving on the NAIC Board this year, which has been a good opportunity to deepen our relationship with this group. 35+ people from our congregation participated in the CROP Walk in October. We also had a good contingent at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service and the service honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. at First Baptist Church in January.

Many of our members continue to participate in the Community Interfaith Choir, which 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 attended the fall Northern New England Ministers retreat this year. I am grateful for the supportive community of colleagues in New Hampshire. I also attended the UU Ministers Association Institute for Excellence in Ministry in January, where I was able to connect with colleagues from across the country and take a workshop on Family Ministry. The rest of the staff has been connecting with their respective professional organizations as well. Sadie attended the LREDA Fall Con in November, and has been going to regional gatherings of LREDA as well. Sherri regularly meets with administrators from around the region.

We hosted the Northern New England District Assembly and Annual Meeting this year, on April 13-14. 140+ people attended from around the district, including several from our congregation. I am grateful to all the volunteers who helped make this happen! We had a full slate of six delegates for the Annual Meeting: Jodie Holway, Ellen Barr, Laurie Barry, Mary Licking, Kathy Fletcher and Karen Thomas.

We will also be hosting a Leadership Development workshop put on by the New England Region on May 12.

We have 5 people lined up to be on-site delegates for General Assembly this year, and one off-site delegate: David Hudson, Carol Houde, Lindsey Hedrick, Brenna Woods, Kathy Grossman, and Gail McMorrow Donahue (off-site). Sherri Woolsey and I will also be attending General Assembly and the professional days that happen beforehand.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Allison Palm