

# 2017-2018 President's Report

*Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua*

June 3, 2018

My name is David Hudson and my pronouns are he, his, and him. This is the last year of my term and I can't tell you how honored I've been to serve as President of this congregation for the past three years.

I am constantly humbled by all the work I see so many of you doing to build this church, support our community, and advocate for social justice. We are clearly so much more than these walls and Sunday services.

In addition to giving you an update on the board's activities this year, I also want to take a brief look back at the past few years. To that end I'd like to start by asking you to cast your mind's eye back to the summer of 2015. It was the summer of love and Frankie Valli *Couldn't Take His Eyes Off You*. Wait, I may have gone back too far...

When I started, we had just called a new minister. We still had an interim Director of Faith Formation and our preschool was struggling. Since then, Allison has settled in and even expanded her family, we searched for a permanent Director of Faith Formation and found Sadie, we successfully combined our preschool with a sister school, developed a Safe Congregations Policy, expanded our staff, and so much more. Plus, we did all of this while delivering our "everyday" programs and services.

At the board level, we oversaw two rounds of bylaws changes, made eighteen changes or additions to our Board Policies, formalized our relationship with the Invested Funds Committee (IFC), expanded our parental leave policy, agreed to deepen the role we should play in some personnel-related matters, and created a Long Range Planning Committee.

I think I would characterize the past few years as "getting our house in order" and "tying up some loose ends" on the governance front. When this church called Rev. Palm, we asked her to serve as our minister and our Executive Director under a policy based governance model. Together, we have worked hard over the past few years to delineate just what that means in practice. It is easy to have all sorts of theoretical ideas about how

things will work, but it isn't until you actually live your policies that you learn just what that means.

I'm happy to report that it feels as if we are at the end of that process, and probably have been for most of this year. There is a great deal of clarity about who does what and everything seems to hum along like a well-oiled machine. It's no surprise then that Allison's parental leave has gone so smoothly.

Let's face it; parental leave is not exactly something this congregation has any experience with, yet it has gone off largely without a hitch. I attribute the success to three things.

1. First, true to her character, Allison prepared us well. She thoroughly and thoughtfully laid the groundwork for her absence. She had seemingly considered every angle long before it even occurred to the board to ask.
2. Second, our Parental Leave Acting Co-Executives (Sherri & Sadie) have stepped up and stepped into their expanded roles without skipping a beat.
3. Finally, our shared work over the past few years to achieve clarity on duties, responsibilities, procedures, and policies has served us well. It has been a long time since I've heard someone in leadership (staff or lay leadership) ask who does what. That may not sound like a big deal, but in my humble opinion, any organization that can temporarily but gracefully operate at a high level over many weeks without its chief executive is doing something very, very right.

To that end, I'm willing to declare that the lion's share of our transition to policy-based governance is complete. I used to say that we had one foot in the new model, but the other foot was still in the middle of taking the last step. I'm now ready to say that the second foot has joined the first.

Going forward, the completion of this transition should free up leadership, both the board and the Executive Director, to redirect their efforts. For our part, the board has been able to spend more of its time looking ahead, a task we had been hard pressed to attend to previously.

Now, I still see two potential challenges on the horizon, although I'm not terribly worried about either one.

1. The board must make sure that it does find itself spending less time on rule making and more time looking ahead, listening to our stakeholders, and monitoring our progress towards our goals. I would say the board began that transition this year.
2. It's possible that some of the remaining issues we need to tackle may be thornier and more complicated. It is a paradoxical curse of progress that the more efficient and effective one becomes, the more problems one can tackle. Eventually you start bumping into things that lack obvious solutions, require cultural change, or are just stubbornly resistant to resolution.

Now, with that multi-year perspective complete, let me turn our focus to the board's activities this year. Like many of the teams and committees at church, the board set several goals for itself and you'll recognize many of these themes in the content of this report.

1. We knew we needed to focus more on linkage, visioning, and monitoring, which are the boards three main duties under policy governance.
2. We wanted to do a better job with record retention, storing board documents, etc. This will remain on our to do list.
3. We wanted to make sure we supported the congregation during Allison's parental leave, but no one seems to need any support.
4. Finally, over the long term, we want to review our vision for CWG-WWS and how it fits into the church's larger mission.

In September the board made two significant changes to the way we operated largely in service of that first goal.

1. We voted to permanently extend our monthly meetings by an hour. We'd discovered that our old, two-hour meetings were often filled with reports and administrative issues. We were struggling to find meaningful chunks of time to focus on bigger-picture tasks. The extra hour has been invaluable and I'm pleased to report that we made good use of that extra time.
2. We divided ourselves into three sub-committees so that we might accomplish more between meetings. Initially we organized around our three tasks: visioning, monitoring, and linkage, but as we

progressed through the year we realized that our sub-committees were ideally suited to handle a variety of larger projects and the mandate of each group broadened. Our smaller groups have become a convenient way to handle projects that require a bit more work, research, or attention than we can bring to bear in our monthly meetings.

In general, I am happy to report that things appear to be going well on many fronts.

- As you'll note in the Invested Fund Committee's report, the endowment grew by 4.5%.
- While pledge receipts were roughly flat year over year, the total number of pledging units was up and it follows several years of steady growth.
- Our Executive Director (Rev. Palm) continues to run things prudently and we'll be closing the year with another surplus.
- I continue to see signs of an active, vibrant church community. Indeed, there seems to be more going on around here than I can keep track of.

I do have one topic that I would like to raise before I ride off into the sunset and that's our Evolving Covenant of Right Relationships. It showed up in some of the Long Range Planning Committee's survey data and, from my vantage point as President, I hear it referenced rather often. Both the board and Rev. Palm are aware that there is some more work for us to do in this area. My sense is that we're still struggling with what having this kind of covenant really means and how it might help us when the going gets tough.

I suspect this will be an area requiring some effort and attention in the coming years. However, I do want to make a few personal observations. My comments are my own, but I hope I have earned a few minutes of your time to share my perspective.

- I sometimes hear the covenant used as a club when one or more of us don't feel like we've been treated fairly or well. From time to time I hear us say something along the lines of, "You have mistreated me and that is a violation of our covenant."

- I would prefer us to think of the covenant as a reminder to ourselves, not a guideline for others. We may be hurt, but we should try to assume good intentions. We may wonder if someone else has forgotten our inherent worth and dignity, but we must not forget theirs.
- I think we all struggle with that last sentence about guidance and are waiting for someone to give us a clear, five step procedure that we can follow to make everything better, or a phone number we can call when we need to patch things up.
  - I don't think there will ever be a magical 'Resolution Policy'. I think we do need to discover some tools to help us work through issues, but I don't think there is any secret process out there for us to find.
  - I worry that sometimes we think this mythical procedure will help the other person see what they could have done differently.
  - I question, too, if we think this sentence guarantees some sort of resolution or proof that someone was right and someone was wrong.
- Finally, I wonder if the whole thing gives us the impression that our relationships can always be right. Heck, I'm not always right with myself, much less the people I love, much less the people I'm fond of, much less the people on my committee with those crazy ideas about things.

Let's face it, being in community is hard and no covenant can change that fundamental truth. The covenant, in my humble opinion, is there to remind us just how hard it is and to serve as a guide for how we might think about conflict when it does arrive. I'd also like it to remind us that conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. Even with great intentions, thoughtful debate, and loving hearts, we are still going to disagree on how to change the world or what color the curtains should be. We will win some arguments and lose some, but that is how it works.

I have three more short, personal notes of gratitude to offer.

First, I want to thank you all for the chance to be President. As I noted at the beginning, I have really enjoyed it. There were a few stressful days here

and there, and a minor heart attack, but I'm going to blame that on bad genes and the local Chinese buffet. Overall the past few years have been a great opportunity to serve a congregation that means a great deal to me. I am not a big fan of stuffing envelopes or making calls, but give me something to write or edit, a meeting to plan, or an issue to debate, and I am your man.

Second, I want to thank everyone who has graciously offered advice and guidance when I needed it most, particularly the past presidents. I knew after watching Gary Lerude up here that I wanted to be president some day. While on the board, I served under Lori Goodman, Ellen Fisher, and Harry Purkhiser. I am indebted to their wisdom, grace, and counsel.

Next, I want to end by taking a moment to thank the member's of this year's Board of Trustees for their work on your behalf throughout the year. Not only have they done great work, but they have been a joy to serve with. Believe it or not, I will miss our monthly meetings. They have sustained me, educated me, and made the trip quite a bit sweeter.

Carol Houde, Vice-President

Lindsey Hedrick, Treasurer

Jodie Holway, Clerk

Steve Hedges

Rick Spitz

Brenna Woods

Pam Jordan

Ellen McCormick (who left us a few months ago)

John Burkitt (who joined us as an interim replacement for Ellen)

Finally, I need to thank my wife, Cindy, who has been patient, supportive, and picked up the slack when my attention has been here.

Respectfully submitted,

David Hudson, President