

Minister's Report 2019-2020
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

Our fifth year of shared ministry together will certainly be a year we will remember. With a global pandemic forcing us to move all our programming and operations online in mid-March, this has turned into a year of unexpected change, rapid adaptation, and exploration of new ways of being in community together. We have done a lot together this year, both before and after our shift to online church, and this report will not try to summarize everything. Instead, I will offer some highlights, a few numbers, a glimpse at the work ahead, and some words of gratitude.

Highlights of the Year

We welcomed a **Ministerial Intern** to our staff this year. Ben Atherton-Zeman began his work with us in August 2019 and will be with us half time through June 15, 2021. Ben has brought new ideas and new perspectives to our staff team and congregation, and is learning quickly what it means to do ministry in our rapidly changing world. I have been grateful for the congregation's warm welcome to Ben and embrace of his ministry with us.

We spent the fall and winter doing some big picture thinking about stewardship and our campus. The **Building Our Vision Team** was formed this year to create a plan for our campus that will serve our mission now and into the future. They reviewed inputs from our Long Range Planning conversations in 2018, utilized our new Values, Mission and Ends, and held five conversations with congregants this year to talk about our physical space. You can read more about their work in their report. We also hired a **Stewardship Consultant**, Mark Ewert, to visit the congregation and offer recommendations on long-term stewardship efforts. Our Stewardship Team will be continuing to work with Mark over the next year to strengthen that part of our congregational life.

January marked the beginning of the **second year of our new model for Greeting and Fellowship Hour**: asking each member to volunteer one Sunday a year as a Greeter and one Sunday a year as a Fellowship Hour Host. The fall months were somewhat rough when it came to Fellowship Hour, as a number of people were signed up who were unwilling to serve or didn't have much experience in the kitchen. We started having eight designated **Lead Hosts** in January, and this helped greatly with both issues, at least in the 2 ½ months that we had Fellowship Hour prior to moving church online. Since moving online, only the Lead Greeters have been serving, offering a point person each week to reach out to newcomers in the chat box.

We had several new endeavors in Faith Formation this year. Chief among those was a new **workshop choice model** for elementary ages. You can read more about that in the Faith Formation Report. One big addition in Adult Faith Formation was a men's and a women's group running monthly throughout the year. We also worked to **serve people of all ages this year**. For our youngest – babies, toddlers and their families – I ran a monthly “Wiggle & Wonder” program on Saturday mornings. We also expanded our Family Corner in the sanctuary to create more space for our young families who were rapidly outgrowing our old corner, and to make them feel more a part of the worship service. We also added a couple of daytime programs in an

effort to serve our retired members: an “Eat, Share, Learn” lunch conversation group, and meditative walks led by Ben in the cemetery. Both of these started just before we moved online, so it is hard to evaluate their efficacy.

The focus of the last three and a half months of the church year has been our **response to the Covid-19 pandemic** and the **move to online church**. As of March 13, all worship and programming moved online. Other than our sexton, our staff also moved to working primarily remotely, with infrequent trips to the office to pick up supplies and complete tasks that have to be done on-site. In the last quarter of the church year, our church staff has focused on the logistics of moving our operations online, holding space for the congregation in these complicated times, and providing opportunities for connection

We are holding worship on Zoom each Sunday morning, as well as livestreaming on our usual link. These services have been greatly appreciated, with somewhat higher estimated attendance than we had been seeing in person. We have also held various weekly opportunities to connect online and several one-time programs. In mid-April, we organized the congregation into Caring Circles, groups of 10 people with one designated leader. The Caring Circle Leaders have been checking in with the other people in their circle on a regular basis, in an effort to keep us all connected in this time of social distancing.

Though our buildings have been closed these past two and a half months, our church is very much open. We are being reminded every day that our congregation is so much more than our church building. We are continuing to worship together, build connection and community, and serve our world through love in action.

This Year by the Numbers

Numbers do not tell the whole story, but do offer a snapshot of what we are up to.

We welcomed **14 new members** this year

Our average summer Sunday attendance was **60** and our average church year attendance was **150**

Our current membership is **277** with about **40** active friends and about **70** children and youth

We had **39** worship services in person and **17** on Zoom

Our children and youth had **21** mornings of Faith Formation programming

Our youth had **20** non-Sunday morning programs

We had **141** sessions of Adult Faith Formation and **about 30** Covenant Group sessions

We hosted **9** Community Dinners

We held **28** events for people of all ages

Our choir/All Ages Choir/Christmas Eve Choir rehearsed **32** times

Teams/Committees/Boards met **120** times

What's Next

The recommendation from our national Unitarian Universalist Association is to plan to continue operating online through at least May 2021. We have been making plans to that effect, and are trying to see this as an opportunity to try new things and expand our concept of what it looks like to build community and connection. It is hard to imagine not seeing each other in person for that long, and it may be that there will be ways we can gather in person in smaller groups before then. However, we are prioritizing the health and safety of everyone in the congregation above all else. And so, our focus next year will be this experiment in building community without being able to gather in person, rather than focusing on how we can most quickly move back to in person worship.

Next fall will also include some time that I will be away on parental leave. My last service will be September 27, and I will be returning in time to lead our Christmas Eve services. Our staff and teams have already been having conversations about coverage during that time, and I am confident that you will be in good hands.

Gratitude

I would be remiss if I did not end this report with a big thank you to all of you who make this congregation continue with your time, talents and money. We exist and are able to further our mission both inside and outside these walls because of you. Thank you. I have been particularly impressed with the resilience, care for one another and adaptability that you all have displayed over the last few months. There is no group of people I would rather be weathering a global pandemic with than this beloved community.

I also want to offer a huge thank you to our staff, who give so much time and dedication: Ben Atherton-Zeman, Lori Bonnette, Jed Holland, Sadie Kahn-Greene, Ericka LaValley, Sandy Martinage, and Sherri Woolsey. Especially over the last few months, our staff has been going above and beyond to keep making church happen in these uncertain times. I am so grateful to share this ministry with all of you.

In faith,
Rev. Allison Palm