

## **Minister's Report 2020-2021**

### **UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm**

When I began serving this congregation nearly seven years ago, I could not have imagined that I would be writing an Annual Report in the 15<sup>th</sup> month of operating virtually. This year was shaped by the continuing global pandemic, a tumultuous national election, and heightened tensions around race in our country. Closer to home, our year was shaped by the increasing normalcy of Zoom worship, efforts to stay connected and keep everyone safe, and the continued motion of life and change that does not pause simply because there is a pandemic going on. In the midst of all the changes this year, I believe we did good and faithful work, living out our mission in new ways.

At least one thing stayed the same: we did a lot together this year and this report will not try to summarize everything. Instead, I will offer some general highlights, some of the specific things we did to further our ends this year, a glimpse at the work ahead, and some words of gratitude.

#### **Highlights of the Year: General**

The biggest focus this year was **ongoing adaptations to how we do church to accommodate virtual operations** in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid shaped pretty much everything that happened this year. I know that it was a hard year for pretty much everyone in different ways. Through it all, we sought to keep connecting with one another and serving our world, as you will see in the highlights that follow. I am really proud of our congregation for how we have continued caring for one another and living our mission in this time.

This has also been a year of change because of various **staff transitions**. I was out for 11 weeks of parental leave in the fall after the birth of my son, Hosea. The rest of our staff ably filled in while I was away, with some support from guest preachers and lay leaders.

In February, we said goodbye to Sherri Woolsey as our Church Administrator after 16 years of serving our congregation on staff. We were lucky that Ericka LaValley, who has been our Faith Formation Assistant for the past few years, was interested in moving into a full time position with us as our new Church Administrator. She has been wonderful in this new role.

We are also anticipating saying goodbye to Sandy Martinage, our long-time sexton, at the end of June. She will be retiring, and we are working on hiring a replacement. I am grateful for all of Sandy's dedicated and thorough work for us over the years. We will miss her!

And finally, Ben Atherton-Zeman will be completing his internship with us on June 15. It has been a wonderful two years with Ben and I am so glad we get to celebrate him by ordaining him as a UU Minister on May 23. We are having another intern starting August 15: Caro Barschow will be with us for two years.

#### **Highlights by Ends Statement**

For each of our Ends, I wanted to share just a couple of the things we've been up to this year. There is a lot that is not included here, but much of that can be found in other reports. The Ends statements are in italics.

*We create brave space for all ages where we:*

- *Know our authentic Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it in the world.*

Our kids learned UU identity this year through a summer **Lego Camp**, which taught about the 6 sources, through amazing **At Home Church Kits**, and through our **Coming of Age** class for teens, a collaboration with UU Manchester.

Our adults also got a **Coming of Age class for Adults** to explore their own beliefs and identity. We also explored UU history, theology and ethics in weekly **Eat Share Learn** sessions.

All ages got to share in a **focus on UU identity in May**, as we explored story as our worship theme, including a **History Walk** in our cemetery, with UU history stories.

- *Develop meaningful spiritual practices that connect us to wonder.*

We held **online worship services** every Sunday and on three evenings that explored new ways of connecting, sharing music, and making meaning of this difficult year.

We held an all ages **Luminaria Story Walk** in December to try to capture the magic and wonder of lights at Christmastime even though we couldn't be in person for our Christmas Eve Candle Lighting.

We **explored various spiritual practices** in our poetry group, covenant groups, and spiritual practices class.

- *Ask for and receive care, support, and connection in times of struggle, joy, and transition.*

Our **Grief Group** moved online and met twice a month all year to support those whose losses were made even more difficult by the pandemic.

Our Pastoral Care Associates **connected monthly with 20 "buddies"** to keep them connected to the church and to offer support.

We created **At Home Church Kits for everyone** in March to offer an extra point of connection as we passed the one year anniversary of virtual church.

- *Grow leaders who serve the needs of our congregation and our community with faith, resilience, and courage.*

Online worship offered **new ways for people to participate in making worship happen:** creating and filming videos, sharing artwork, and lighting the chalice from home.

We worked to **support our leaders** as they continued to do amazing work for the church even in the midst of all the extra stressors this year.

We brought together 35 people for a **Community Summit** in March to reflect on our year of virtual church and consider how we wanted to move forward together.

- *Steward our congregational community with our time, talent, and money.*

We had a very **successful Stewardship Campaign**, exceeding our \$350,000 goal.

The Stewardship Team held **two online auctions**, which together raised over \$8000.

We have continued to have **strong volunteer support** for our programs, and have gotten to learn about new talents that people have to help support our virtual format.

- *Participate actively in our larger Unitarian Universalist community.*

We had a **full slate of delegates** at the fall Northern New England District meeting where delegates voted to dissolve the district.

**Virtual General Assembly** last year made it possible for 20 people from our congregation to attend. We have at least 8 attending virtual GA this year as well.

Being online has made it **easier to connect to our larger denomination**, through online vigils, recorded worship services and virtual conferences and trainings.

- *Understand systems of oppression and privilege and work to dismantle them within ourselves, our congregation, our community, and the larger world.*

We participated in the UUA's **30 Days of Love**, sharing resources for learning and leading weekly reflection on those resources.

We have formed a **Land Acknowledgement Working Group**, which is studying the history of the land our church is on and building relationships with indigenous communities in Nashua and New Hampshire.

Several members of the Racial Justice Working Group attending the **New Day Rising conference** online, which invited us to think about our next steps in dismantling white supremacy culture in our congregation.

- *Work in deep partnership to advance justice and heal our community and our world.*

We served as the pilot host of a **Lil' Free Farmstand**, in partnership with Grow Nashua, collecting and sharing produce with our neighbors.

We engaged in **UU the Vote**, connecting with the nationwide effort, and partnering locally with the Granite State Organizing Project and UU Action NH to connect with all the voters in our congregation and send 1000 postcards to our neighbors.

### **What's Next**

As vaccinations increase and Covid cases decrease in our state, we are hoping to move into the next stage of our Covid Policy, which allows for **more outdoor gatherings**, especially in small groups. I anticipate moving into this stage sometime in June.

By fall, I hope we will be able to move to **multiplatform operations**, as recommended by our UUA. We have a Multiplatform Worship Task Force assembled, who has been working hard at designing a worship service format that will be meaningful for participants in our sanctuary and online. We are also exploring ideas for Faith Formation, and other church programs.

Next year, we will have **two new staff members** (sexton and intern) to welcome to our community. We will also have some **staff leave time**. Ericka, our Church Administrator, will be taking parental leave in the fall, and Sadie, our Director of Faith Formation, will be taking sabbatical January 15-May 15, 2022. I am also looking ahead to sabbatical, which I am currently planning to take July 1-November 30, 2022.

### **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. You have been amazing to one another throughout this difficult year. I am so grateful to be serving such a kind, resilient congregation!

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, and Sandy Martinage. They have gone above and beyond this year, and I am filled with gratitude for our shared ministry.

In faith,  
Rev. Allison Palm