

Minister's Report 2021-2022
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

Here we are at the end of our seventh year of shared ministry. I feel both like I have been your minister forever, and like it has all gone in the blink of an eye. This year, like the six before it, has brought its own unique joys and challenges. As we prepared for our Stewardship Campaign this winter, I remarked to the Stewardship Team that it felt like we could no longer talk about “unprecedented times” when we are two years in to a pandemic. And yet, at the same time, we are still in the midst of a time of reinvention, a time when we are trying to sort out what the new normal will be. With new Covid-19 variants coming every few months, continued political turmoil both in our state and in the nation, war, and the ever present threat of the climate crisis, there is no shortage of challenge and change. And through it all, we are tired – tired of navigating the pandemic, tired of waking up to bad news yet again, tired of this whirlwind and change.

And yet, here we are, at the end of another year of building beloved community together – both within and beyond our congregation. This congregation continues to amaze me with your resilience and deep, genuine care for each other and for our world. We have done good ministry together this year, living into our mission as a welcoming community of faith, inspiring lives of wonder, generosity and courage, serving the world through love in action.

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 the **shift from all virtual worship, programs and operations to multiplatform congregational life**. We made this shift slowly and deliberately, and I think that has paid off in terms of the quality of multiplatform experience we are able to offer, especially in terms of worship. We continue to navigate this shift, especially in this current pandemic moment, when needs and risk tolerance vary from person to person. I am grateful for our Safe Congregation Response Team, who has carefully and faithfully thought through the various risks and needs to come up with policies that speak to whatever moment in which we have found ourselves.

Another focus has been the work of the **Building Our Vision Team**, which is taking the vision for our building that you voted on in fall 2020 and turning it into concrete plans for the congregation to vote on this fall. Between hiring an architect, and creating five task forces to work on the specifics, the BOV Team has been very busy. This is an exciting process, which I hope you will all engage in! You can read about the project in more detail in their report.

This year has also been shaped by **staff transitions and leave time**. In June, we welcomed a new sexton, Mark Connolly, and in August we welcomed a new Ministerial Intern, Caro Barschow. Both have been fabulous additions to our staff team!

In the fall, our Administrator, Ericka LaValley was away for 12 weeks of parental leave, and in the spring our Director of Faith Formation, Sadie Kahn-Greene was away for 4 months of sabbatical. I will

be heading off on 5 months of sabbatical starting July 1. We are grateful to be able to be generous with the leave time we give our staff, knowing that this work is demanding, and that we care about the well being of those who are in our employment. In this year and a half of various kinds of leave, the staff set this as our goal: “Continuing our work through staff leave time, using the opportunity to strategically cultivate lay leadership, and having realistic expectations about what we can accomplish.” The congregation has been hugely supportive and understanding about all of this, and we have navigated the first two chunks of leave well. I am confident that my sabbatical will go just as smoothly.

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 online **Wizard Camp**, through **workshops both online and in person**, amazing **At Home Church Kits**, and through the **Our Whole Lives** class for middle schoolers, which we were so glad to be able to offer in person this winter and spring.

We once again had a **Coming of Age class for Adults** to explore their own beliefs and identity.

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

We held first **online and then multiplatform worship services** every Sunday and on three evenings that offered connection, music and meaning-making. We held **four Christmas Eve Services, with online, outdoor and indoor options** for candles and singing.

We began **singing together** again in person, first outdoors, and then indoors. Our choir is getting back in shape after re-gathering starting in May.

We **explored various spiritual practices** in our poetry group, covenant groups, spiritual practices classes, and Switch It Up Sundays.

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

Our Pastoral Care Associates **led a Sunday service in February** to share more about pastoral care, and encourage the congregation to ask for support when they need it.

We created and delivered **Boxes of Sunshine for everyone** in February to offer an extra point of connection in the midst of a difficult winter.

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

We are **engaging more than 20 people in our Building Our Vision Taskforces**, giving a wide swath of the congregation input and insight into that process.

We are continuing to **welcome new people into leadership**. It is so exciting to see your talents in action!

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

We had another **successful Stewardship Campaign**, raising just slightly more than last year, in a year when many congregations are seeing a dip in giving.

We had lots of great volunteer help during our staff leave time, and in our shift to multiplatform worship. So much gratitude is due to those **volunteers who really went above and beyond**. I especially want to shout out Carol Houde and Jess Woods, who were sabbatical co-chairs for Sadie's sabbatical, and Frank Grossman, who has headed up our multiplatform transition and has put in countless hours making our Sunday mornings work!

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

Eight people attended Virtual **General Assembly**, and we have 12 attending either virtually or in person this year, including a full slate of delegates.

Our staff team has done two mini-retreats in **collaboration with the staff at the Concord, NH UU congregation**. We have been able to connect about our similar joys and challenges, and how to support the NH UU community

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

A small group spent much of the year reading and discussing the UUA report of the Commission on Institutional Change: "**Widening the Circle of Concern**." They have come up with five recommendations from that report, which you can read about in the Social Justice report.

Our **Land Acknowledgement Working Group**, has done deep work studying the history of our land and building relationships with indigenous people here in NH. They have created a Land Acknowledgement statement for us to vote on at Annual Meeting

Caro Barschow has worked with members of the congregation to get a **Renewal of Welcoming Team** together, which is re-invigorating our work around LGBTQ welcoming and advocacy, including planning a robust participation in this year's Nashua Pride.

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

I worked with a core group of clergy from across the state to launch a **Clergy Caucus** of the Granite State Organizing Project. They are focused currently on racial justice and affordable housing.

We rededicated a **new Black Lives Matter banner** this year, designed by a local Black-owned design firm. Members of Black Lives Matter Nashua, who we have been building relationship with, spoke at our re-dedication in the fall.

We have continued our relationship with Grow Nashua, serving as a site for a **Lil' Free Farmstand** both last summer and this summer.

What's Next

We continue to **figure out how to operate in this multiplatform time**, which I am sure will be an ongoing process through next fall as well. With the unpredictability of the pandemic and whatever new variants may arise, we will try to remain nimble and responsive to whatever comes.

The **Building Our Vision** work will be really taking off next year, with our plan being to vote on changes to our building in November. We'd love to be able to be done with that project in time for our 200th anniversary in 2026.

As mentioned, I will be heading off on a **five month sabbatical** starting July 1. In addition to taking time to rest and renewal, I will be working on a book of UU rituals that I am co-editing, and hope to ground myself more deeply in this local area by walking every block in Nashua. Caro Barschow will be serving as half-time Sabbatical Minister August-November, Sadie and Ericka will work with Caro to act as a Sabbatical Executive Team, and we will have two Sabbatical co-chairs who will work with the staff to help cover everything. I am so grateful for this time away, and can't wait to be back with you in December with new energy and inspiration.

Gratitude

Of course, I cannot end my report without some gratitude. First of all, 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 even as this pandemic drags on and our patience is thin. I am always amazed at the love and dedication I find in this community.

I also want to offer a huge thank you to our staff, who give so much time and dedication: Caro Barschow, Lori Bonnette, Mark Connolly, Jed Holland, Sadie Kahn-Greene, and Ericka LaValley. They consistently go above and beyond, pouring their hearts into this work and this community, and I am filled with gratitude for our shared ministry.

In faith,
Rev. Allison Palm