

Minister's Report 2023-2024
UU Church of Nashua, NH - Rev. Allison Palm

This year marks nine years of shared ministry together, and it has been one of my favorite years of ministry with you all yet. After three years that were really shaped by the pandemic, this year felt like we were really back and able to focus on living our mission more deeply. It has been a year of anticipation and planning, a year of community building and fun, a year of grief and loss, and a year of deepening our shared UU identity.

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

Our Building Our Vision Team put in a ton of work this year, working with our architects to take the rough plans we voted on last year and turn them into detailed plans for a building that will allow us to move into our next 200 years together. This work has included 3 task forces, focused on the organ, oak tree and sanctuary, 2 verbal updates to the congregation, and first monthly then weekly meetings with our architects. We are nearly ready to begin the construction phase, just waiting on approval from the Historic District Commission and final pricing and decisions.

In the midst of all that work, we also had a lot of fun together as a congregation this year. We went on a summer camping trip together, had group nights out to see the Barbie movie and an ActorSingers show, had an In-person Auction with more laughter than I've ever heard at a fundraiser, sang carols and drank cocoa together in December, and gathered for pizza and games in February. We also brought back Circle Dinners this year, with 27-40 adults gathering for dinners in homes and here at the church in September, January and April. Each Circle Dinner was accompanied by a Kids Movie Night at the church, which allowed parents to attend the dinners as well.

This year was marked by a lot of loss in our congregation, which I know took a toll on everyone. It also gave us an opportunity to do what we do best: come together to support one another through those tough times. You all showed up for each other again and again this year, with hugs and food and memories, reminding us all that grief is an easier load to bear when we do it together.

We deepened our sense of community this year, and I believed we deepened our UU faith as well. We gathered for coffee conversations, new covenant groups, discussions about proposed changes to our UU principles, explorations of our history as UUs, and to talk about love and whether or not it is at the center of our faith. In our worship services and faith formation workshops, we explored the new proposed UU values as monthly themes throughout the year: love, justice, equity, transformation, generosity, interdependence and pluralism.

All in all, we have done such 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.

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.

- We held **Our Whole Lives** classes for K-2nd grade in the fall and 4th-6th grade in the spring. Attendance was excellent for both programs.
- Our fall Switch-it-up Sunday was **UU History themed**, with workshops for all ages about our spiritual ancestors.
- Our Ministerial Intern Erin Scott led us in engaging in **learning and conversations around the proposed changes to Article II of the UUA Bylaws**. This included two 4-session groups, a sermon, a Switch-it-Up Sunday full of workshops on Article II, and bringing the materials to our Huntington Group.

Develop meaningful spiritual practices that connect us to wonder.

- We have continued to hold **high quality multiplatform services every Sunday**, and expanded our tech team with some new volunteers this year. We also held 2 Christmas Eve services and an evening Winter Solstice Service.
- Our music program has been excellent this year, with **more instrumentalists** playing on Sundays, including bass, guitar, drums, cello, oboe and more.
- We **held a Ritual to Honor Elders** on March 24, with 18 elders participating. It was deeply appreciated by people of all ages.

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

- Our Pastoral Care Associates **led a Sunday service in April** about interdependence, and the gift of receiving help.
- We continued **monthly Caring Circles** through most of the year, inviting a different group to come each month for mutual support and sharing, alongside an ongoing **Caregivers Support Group** led by Sadie.
- I led a 3-session **End of Life Planning** workshop in the fall, which had about 16 participants.

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

- We once again held two **Leadership Summits** this year. The Fall summit was focused on Identifying and Exploring Your Gifts, and the spring was focused on preparing for our upcoming time out of our building.

- We **welcomed several newer members** into leadership this year, including as Worship Associates, Lead Greeters, on the Music Team, Stewardship Team and Social Justice Team, and in both children's and adult Faith Formation.

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

- We collected over **60% of our total Capital Campaign commitments** in this first year of giving. This puts us in a great position as we begin construction this summer. We also had a fantastic Stewardship Campaign, with an 8% increase in pledges over last year.
- Our online and in person **Harvest Auction** was a huge success. We exceeded our goal of \$10,000, about half of which came in online and half in person. We have 53 people at the in-person event, along with 14 kids who attended the Kid's Movie Night that happened at the same time.

Participate actively in our larger Unitarian Universalist community.

- Eight people attended **General Assembly** last year, some virtual and some in person and we have 11 attending either virtually or in person this year, including a full slate of delegates.
- Sadie worked with a couple colleagues to plan and host a **youth con** on March 9. 7 of our youth attended, along with 8 youth from 2 other congregations.
- Sadie worked with the New England Region to **host a 7th-12th grade Our Whole Lives Training** for UUs from all over the country this spring.

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

- We brought back the **story of the Campbell family** in a Worship Service on March 3, which people really appreciated. Many of our newer folks did not know the story, so it felt important to share again. In conjunction with this, we help a book discussion group on the UUA Common Read, "On Repentance and Repair" a few weeks later.
- The Welcoming Congregation Working Group held a wonderful "**My Queer Faith**" event with Kimayo, a musician from Dover, on April 6. We had 40+ attendees for a moving performance from Kimayo, followed by a panel conversation.

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

- Faith Formation organized a collection and **holiday gift bag packing for Meals on Wheels** on Nov. 26. We helped pack 200 bags.
- We held a session called "**NH Politics 101**" on April 14, led and organized by Paige Beauchemin, with support from Erin. There was a great panel and awesome attendance – about 30 people, with a mix of folks from the congregation and from the larger community.
- We hosted an **Overnight Warming Station** run by the City of Nashua from February-April. It was deeply appreciated by folks in the community, but unfortunately I don't think it is something we have the capacity to take on in the future, unless it is a very different set up. It was too much of a burden on our staff and volunteers. I am glad we tried it and were able to offer our space this time around, even if it doesn't seem like something that would work as a yearly thing.

What's Next

We will be saying goodbye to our Sexton, Mark Connolly at the end of June. It has been such a joy to work with him, and we are so grateful for his work over the last three years. He is entering full retirement, and is excited. We are working on hiring for two positions to fill the Sexton role going forward. One will be our main Sexton, who will work Monday-Friday about 4 hours a day. That person will also be the one to respond to emergencies as needed, and meet with the Property Team. The second position will be just Sunday mornings and will have responsibility for cleaning and supporting Sunday morning programming, including being the point person who for Coffee Crew volunteers. That person will also have the opportunity to pick up extra hours when we have rentals.

We will be starting construction on our building this summer, hopefully in July. After July 7, we will be worshipping out of our building for at least 5 months. The first couple months, we will be at Temple Beth Abraham. We are still working on securing a place for the fall. This whole process – construction and being in different spaces - will be brand new for all of us, so next year will need to be one of flexibility and grace as we learn together. Hopefully in the second half of the year we will be back in our newly renovated space and get to enjoy it!

And, I trust that even through this time of displacement, next year will be another year of living in to our mission and ends, offering a place of wonder and welcome and a voice for justice in Nashua in the coming year.

Gratitude

Of course, I cannot end my report without some gratitude. I want to offer a huge thank you to our staff, who give so much time and dedication: Lori Bonnette, Mark Connolly, Emma Goyette, Jed Holland, Sadie Kahn-Greene, Ericka LaValley, Sam Murray, and Erin Scott. 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.

Thank you to our Board of Trustees: I am consistently in awe of their steady leadership, and the many gifts they offer to our community.

And finally, 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 are a really amazing group of individuals and a beautiful community, and I am so grateful for the ways you care for one another and for our world.

I look forward to our continued shared ministry in the coming year!

In faith,
Rev. Allison Palm