

## DEVELOPMENTAL MINISTER ANNUAL REPORT

UU Fellowship of Manhattan, Kansas

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This year, the national political climate has raised anxiety and created opportunities. Every day conditions seem to shift and change. Not only does this focus and increase our opportunity for public witness, but it also creates demands in terms of pastoral care as people's anxiety rises. At the same time, it's important to have a balance where the fellowship addresses needs and interests outside the political, recognizes that many strategies and approaches have legitimacy, and limits our activities to where our basic values, rather than particular political agendas, are assaulted. These are challenging times.

Additionally, our national Unitarian Universalist Association has suffered turmoil, as the recognition of racially discriminatory hiring patterns led to the resignation of UUA President Peter Morales and two other highly-placed staff leaders. The result remains to be seen, but it *could* be a renewed effort to make ourselves an authentic anti-racist, multi-cultural movement. You might want to follow events at General Assembly this June.

Meanwhile, we at UUFM continue to analyze what we need to do to live into our best selves as a congregation. One way to focus that analysis is through our established developmental ministry goals. I have based most of my report to you around these three goals:

### **STRATEGIC ACTION TO CREATE STRONG, VISIBLE, AND SOCIALLY ACTIVE PRESENCE**

1. *Participation.* Accomplishing this goal requires our members to consider where they fit in our social action presence. Many members have been involved with the Kansas People's Agenda (15 attended a day-long rally and visit to our representatives); the annual Building Beloved Community statewide conference for UU's and allies; UUSC's Guest at Your Table; contributing to Helping Hands and supporting the groups we give to through HH; collecting items for the FIT Closet, dental clinic, and emergency shelter; participation in Manhattan Alliance for Peace and Justice (MAPJ) events, and encouragement of the local Islamic Center, all efforts aligned specifically with the fellowship. On a broader scale, members rallied around causes not formally supported by the congregation – a newly established Manhattan group Making Change, Indivisible (the key group resisting the Trump agenda), the Women's March, and efforts to support immigrants. We are engaged and making a difference in our community and beyond.
2. *Specific congregation-wide efforts.* Individual efforts are fabulous as we strive to reshape the world according to our values. However, we must also act together on the congregational level if we are to be known by our acts. Despite not having formal designated leadership of our Social Action Committee this year, there were three areas where we worked together putting our fellowship's name forward. First, our continued support went towards enactment of the local ordinance that forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. We saw the ordinance approved in the summer and in effect in November. Second, we learned about the struggles of Native peoples against oppression and formally voted as a congregation to encourage the end of Native mascots in USD 383. Finally, we expressed support for our Muslim neighbors, with the Board visiting the Islamic Center Open House, our members and children sending 26 letters of support, and everyone supporting my involvement in producing a citywide clergy letter of support for our Islamic neighbors. Our particular congregational efforts emerge from the interests of our members and the circumstances of our context. Thus, it's hard to predict what may come next, though there seems to be energy around support for immigrants, refugees, and fair immigration policy.
3. *Inside our congregation.* Part of our justice efforts must always include making our own building and events as consistent with our values as possible. To that end, the Board took two actions this year that you should notice soon – declaring our space as gun-free, and correcting our bathroom signage to be more welcoming to transgender people.
4. *Ministerial involvement.* I spend significant energy in the area of social action. I currently serve as secretary of MAPJ, and attend a wide variety of community meetings and boards (#ReimageMHK, Martin Luther King Committee, Coalition for Equal Justice, the Affordable Housing Group of Making Change, etc.). I spoke at the rally in response to the shootings of primarily Latinx people in the Orlando gay bar and at the rally against the immigration executive order restricting Muslims' entry into the country. My being recognized in the community helps the fellowship to be recognized.

### **FULL-TIME MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP MODEL**

1. *Sunday Services.* This report is a good place to disclose my approach to Sunday services, a major part of any minister's job. I shared these goals with the Board almost a year ago.
  - a. Help members and friends to explore various forms and understandings of spirituality and theology so they have resources to rely on as they cope with life's challenges and opportunities.
  - b. Develop the talents and interests of fellowship members so they can effectively inspire, inform, and connect with other members in the context of Sunday services.
  - c. Increase the religious literacy of members and friends.
  - d. Strengthen and celebrate the social bonds and the institution of UUFM.
  - e. Support involvement in the larger community by members and friends.
2. *Themes and Chalice Circles.* In service of these goals, this year we adopted themes for use in our Sunday services and beyond, using a UU-developed resource called "Soul Matters." Soul Matters includes materials for worship, for small group ministry and for religious education. We have used them in all three areas. We currently have 5 Chalice Circles meeting monthly, with 25-30 people participating altogether, plus we have had occasional ad-hoc meetings of an introductory version we call "Chalice Circle Light." If you are not in a Chalice Circle, but would like to be, please contact me, or one of our facilitators (Susan Adamchak, Jane Pelletier, and Jessica Sievers).
3. *Meditation Circle.* We added a Sunday afternoon Meditation Circle in the last month, precipitated by members' interest in having a way to deepen and pursue spiritual practice. We have had 6-8 people attending.
4. *Participation in leadership.* I have worked actively with the Board, Strategic Planning Committee, and chairs of various committees. With the void in Social Action leadership, I have done more of the organizing in that area than I did last year, or expect to in coming years. The Board is currently reassessing how we organize the work of the congregation, so that we can involve more people in small ways, without over-burdening leaders. The Strategic Planning Committee's work, which you will hear reported on at our meeting, has been significant.
5. *Communications.* Though this is primarily a lay and administrative responsibility, I have to spend a fair amount of time and effort with communications. In the digital age, as people are overwhelmed with information and technology evolves almost daily, effective and efficient communication – internally and externally -- has become both imperative and impossible. Communications Chair Marisa Larson has worked with me, our administrator, and Mark Clarke (website) to bring our newsletter up to the digital age, as you will see soon. Carolyn Kelly deserves congratulations on her sweeping improvements to our bulletin boards, a traditional but valuable way to let newcomers know who we are and regulars find out what's new.
6. *Staff supervision and support.* One of my responsibilities is supervision of our small but dedicated staff. Our major challenge this year was a shift to compliance with Fair Labor Standards law. As changes happened at the national level, we realized that our part time staff needed to be compensated on an hourly, rather salaried, basis. The most likely way most people have noticed this is in the increased regularity of our administrator's presence at the building. The change also reminds us that we cannot expect our part time staff to work outside of their designated hours without increased compensation.
7. *Pastoral Care.* As relationships have developed and deepened, I find myself more involved with pastoral care. We have strong support from the congregation for most people who have medical and other life issues arise. Most care comes from them, organized by Caring Committee chair Linda Kroeger. If you know of pastoral concerns, please be in touch with Linda or me.
8. *Rites of Passage.*
  - a. We commemorated 4 deaths this year: Barbara Hacker, Edith Hinrichs, Jim Mitchell and Jack Warren. All were long-term members and are missed for their individuality and their connections to the fellowship.
  - b. I officiated at one outside wedding and one including a member (Ellen Meyer and Ari Jumpponen).

#### **GROW IN WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR GOALS**

1. *Strategic Planning.* The work of the Strategic Planning Committee is essential to our ability to grow. We do not have adequate space. The parking lot is full more often than not on Sundays. We have one RE class meeting in the minister's office. Our sanctuary is often more than 80% full (which church consultants tell us is the point where new people perceive there may not be room for them), particularly while the children are with us, though the rearrangement by the Sunday Services Committee has improved the situation by

making seating more accessible with shorter rows. The Strategic Planning Committee will continue to pay most attention to the longest-term perspective, while we put together other groups to implement shorter-term needs, including additional space for religious education.

2. *Second Service Task Force.* The Board has appointed Mark Clarke to chair a task force of members to determine how we might implement two services each week. The group will include representatives from music, religious education, greeting and other people who understand the full scope of what we do on Sunday mornings.
3. *Progressive Summerfest.* We held a successful event bringing people to our congregation to learn more about us and other community groups we work with. It was a tremendous amount of work, though, and we decided that our best path will be to have a presence through tabling at other established events in the community.
4. *Path to Membership.* Classes following the Sunday service were offered twice during the year. A mix of newcomers and long-termers attended. A third class will be offered June 11 and 18, at 12:15, since we have other newcomers interested in joining.
5. *Welcoming Workshop.* Dori Davenport Thexton, our regional staff person, held a well-attended workshop on welcoming that I believe focused members on improving their welcome of newcomers. The same weekend, she met with several of our committees to help shape their approach.
6. *Membership* has not grown in the past twelve months, but the cast has changed. Shirley Hobrock does a remarkable job tracking people. We currently have 116 members, the same number as last year at the Annual Meeting. New members this year were: Matt Ebersole, Ashley Fulps & William Mitchell, Michelle Hill, Deepak Subramony, Shannon Skelton, Jesse Finkemeier, Emily Fraser & Rob Morrison and Angela Bauer.

#### **LOOK FORWARD TO**

1. *Evaluation of Development Ministry.* In this upcoming third year of the program, we will evaluate the ministry, my role in it, and how we will move forward. Courtney Albin, our Chair-Elect, will have more information about this at the annual meeting.
2. *Local interfaith efforts.* A void I have noticed in the community is the lack of a regular interfaith connection among the various religious groups in our community. The assumption in Manhattan seems to be that faith = Christian; in fact, some people in the community assume we are a Christian group. The only way I know to overcome this mistake is for the non-Christian groups to find a way to make their presence more widely known and to do that through working together. This could help us better define our niche in Manhattan. Energy is stirring on the issue, and meetings being held. It will be something I pay attention to in the coming year. Let me know if there are ways you'd like to be involved.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to serve this vibrant congregation at this significant time in its history. I am grateful for the work of all those involved in so many ways, including but not limited to our staff members, the Executive Board, committee chairs and members, Chalice Circle facilitators, religious education teachers, musicians and UUFM singers, greeters, and everyone who sees something that needs to be done and makes it happen, often without recognition. Together, we are so much more than we are alone. In the next year or so, we will be making decisions that shape the future as we examine what to do about space and other issues we confront. Exciting and challenging times!

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Developmental Minister