

Annual Report – June 2021

Submitted by the Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti, Senior Minister

As we move toward the close of the current congregational year, I can only marvel at what an unprecedented and historic congregational year it has been. We have journeyed together through the first-ever year-long nurturing and maintenance of congregational community in a primarily distance-based virtual space; so much learning and adjustment has been needed from us all. It has been a year of yearned for civic and political change, while also being one of upheaval: we have seen how fragile our cherished democracy can be, even as many of us have labored hard in protecting and supporting it. It has been a time of inward reflection, of connecting with the natural world, and of looking deeper at ourselves and the meaning/purpose of our lives. It has been a time of dreaming about justice and greater equality, and one of actively shifting and re-imagining that which needs to be re-imagined in support of that. When taken as a whole, truly, it has been a time like no other.

In the midst of all that, our community has continued being a force for good here in Washtenaw County, and an exemplar of what community can be to others around the nation and globe. Our congregants have helped articulate UUAA's priority areas, which will tangibly guide our efforts, harness our collective energies, and demonstrate how we Unitarian Universalists are locally living into our values and commitments. (Please see the video recording of the May 23rd Vision 2050 Team-led Sunday service for more on all this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuZjxKtEAEs>.) This vision is one unambiguously grounded in the arc of our community's history, connecting the hopes and dreams of our community's founders to the needs of today. It is a trajectory of progressive thought and action, one that has consistently been embodied through our community's presence and leadership. It is a historical trajectory that we can take deep pride in. Uncertainties lie ahead, we know – and, we Unitarian Universalists are a people of courage, committed to one another and the greater good, just as our members have been since UUAA's inception. That history will anchor us and guide us well. We can rely on it.

Leaning into that historical arc, of who we have been as a community and where we are headed, the time ahead will be one of building and re-building. We are actively building the multi-modal processes and structures that will allow us to honor our community's commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. This will look like multiple meeting rooms that will be able to accommodate in-person and virtual participants simultaneously. It will include Sunday services that you will be able to continue livestreaming from your living room or watch on demand, at your leisure, as well as join live, in-person on a Sunday morning. It will mean re-gathering together, in the early fall, after a long hiatus, no doubt with tears of joy at simply being in one another's physical presence once again. I would hazard to say that none of us is exactly who we were in February 2020, before the pandemic settled in. As such, we will be getting reacquainted with one another, discovering who we are today, and what our needs are now, in this new time.

It is no small accomplishment that at the start of the pandemic our leadership teams recognized, and committed to meeting, to 'showing up for,' the immense pastoral stresses that many of our community members have been navigating. On a personal level, I feel strongly that love and mutual care are at the heart of community; it is the foundation that roots community and helps it weather any storms. We made manifesting our community's love and care a top priority, and by and large, our

community created and innovated forms of congregant support, outreach, and care that were widely received and appreciated. This is not something to take for granted. The experience of love and care, in times of such profound societal need, matters. We did well in this regard, each and every one of us who helped do something big or small: from the gift of handmade face masks, that helped kept people safe; to pastoral shawls; to Quarantine Buddies; to cards, flowers, & gift baskets received and delivered; to respite meals for families and caregivers; to meditation circles in which we quietly 'held' one another; to pandemic-era support groups; to lending one another our silliness and support on Facebook; to our Valentine's Day Love Tree; to the many individual and small group efforts to reach out, check-in with one another, and be the expression of love. I am so very proud of each and every one of you – it is this spirit that makes UUAA such a remarkable, healthy community.

The new congregational year ahead, our fourth year together, will likely hold its own unique challenges and opportunities, as every season of community and human living does. Having been through this 2020-2021 season with you - in all its immense and never-ending complexity - I dare say, proactively, "we've got this" --

The spirit of UUAA is strong,

*our shared commitment to meeting the needs of our time is unwavering, and
the deep wellsprings of love, at the core of our community, will sustain us.*

I love you. It's such a beautiful thing to be on this journey of community with you.

ADDENDUM A

(Previously published in the November 2020 UUAA Monthly Newsletter.)

Senior Ministry Goals for the 2020-2021 Congregational Year

Living in a time of inherent and complex uncertainty, goals/plans for the current congregational year are contingent on assumptions which may or may not hold as the year unfolds, such as: key members of the staff team (including the Senior Minister) will not be incapacitated for prolonged durations of time due to illness; the public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Washtenaw County will remain roughly commensurate with what we have locally experienced to-date; UUAA will gradually return to in-person activities sometime in 2021, while maintaining digital/virtual access to activities and programs; and, the financial impact to UUAA of pandemic-related recessionary pressures will be modest-to-moderate and institutionally manageable.

Given these assumptions, in collaboration and consultation with the UUAA Board of Trustees, Rev. Manish has finalized the following prioritized goals, and summary work plan, for the senior ministry for the 2020-2021 congregational year:

- 1) Spiritually and institutionally supporting UUAA thru the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be worked on by:
 - Supporting community members pastorally, spiritually, and/or ethically as they engage in the public health, justice, societal, and/or personal needs of this time; and,
 - Convening UUAA's COVID-19 Advisory Team, in support of discerning the best health and safety operational practices for our UUAA community during the pandemic.

- 2) Deepening and articulating UUAA's staff team structures, both during and post-pandemic, in support of longer-term sustainability, affordability, and stability. This will be worked on by:
 - Leading and guiding the staff team through pandemic-era restructuring of the team's work and work flow, with an eye toward resumption of more 'typical' work and work flow on the other end of the pandemic;
 - Partnering with the UUAA Working Group on Personnel in the continued improvement of our documentation related to employment practices/expectations, job descriptions, and staff contracts/letters of hire, as well as on matters related to the sustainability of our staff team structures; and,
 - Leading/guiding any necessary staffing reconfigurations/reimaginings that support our forward momentum into a post-pandemic era, with an eye towards aligning lay and staff efforts to live into UUAA's 2050 vision and its core values.

- 3) Continuing to transition, develop, and deepen Sunday service experiences during this pandemic era, with an eye toward post-pandemic operations. This will be worked on by:
 - Continuing the pandemic era transition of our Sunday services, with an eye toward virtual era operational sustainability;
 - Forward planning for post-pandemic operations, which will require the possibility of virtual access for community members side-by-side with in-person access;
 - Developing and living into staffing models (paid professional + unpaid volunteer) that can sustainably support multi-modal Sunday services.

- 4) Supporting the Board of Trustees in implementing its action planning for Vision 2050 outcomes. This will be worked on by:
 - Supporting staff alignment with and support of our community's eventual Vision 2050 action plan, with an eye towards the sustainable engagement of the staff team with such.
 - Providing the Board with relevant information ("monitoring") and guidance in support of action planning and anticipated needs related to the organizational alignment with such.

- 5) Continuing to support healthy, covenant-based relationship, healthy communication, and healthy processes within the congregation. This will be worked on by:
 - Supporting and guiding the work of UUAA's organizational development doctoral intern, Rev. Amber Beland;
 - Supporting the ongoing work of the Shared Ministries Team, the Living Our Values Team, and the Music Ambassadors Team in support of such goals;
 - Convening the Healthy Congregation Response Team, as/if needed; and,
 - Continuing the development, revision, and/or articulation of operational processes and policies, as warranted and as institutional capacity allows.