

Minister's Annual Report 2020-21

As we look back in the history of our congregation, there may never have been such a disruptive past year to our ways of worshipping and being in assembly together.

I knew from the beginning of the pandemic that we were going to be on Zoom a long time. But I thought there would be a return to normal this fall. I had no idea the Delta variant would be a thing.

While Zoom worship worked and kept us together, being in our sanctuary and singing and lighting candles is something that I find hard to replicate online. Something wells up in me, the spirit. Yes, it can and does happen on Zoom. However, there is something about the wood, the windows, the creaking pews, the reverberation of the music, the texture of our grey hymnals covers, and even the musty smells. There is something to knowing that for hundreds of years our spiritual ancestors met in this same way.

Besides managing staff, pastoral care, and worship, much of my extra time was spent working with the COVID Safety Task Force and learning new technology. In order to get to a place where we could experiment with dual platform worship I needed to do a lot research which included:

- Consulting with the oracle of Youtube
- Bringing in a sound system consultant
- Reaching out to several UU ministers
- Securing a small grant from New York State Convention of Universalists
- Purchasing the technology

Thank you to Jon Montan and John Danis who partnered with me to make this all happen!

Zoom is here to stay. At the very least, Zoom works great for small group and committee meetings. However, with dual platform worship I fear we may develop two congregations: the one that comes in person and the one that logs in virtually. I am not sure if that is bad or good.

Staff

Our current staff of Betsy, Sara, Shelby, and Carol have all been dedicated to our mission. Despite the stresses and anxieties of the pandemic they have been creative and resilient. I am blessed to be able to minister with them. We said goodbye to Teresa Veramendi, our Social Justice Coordinator. My hope is to hire a new Social Justice Coordinator next year.

It has been difficult to find a Director of Music. Part of that is the job market and part of it is that there are not a lot of people in our area who want to and are qualified to do the work.

Shout Outs

I know that many groups and individuals have stepped up during this pandemic. Stewardship had a great StimUulus campaign. Church Council has always put the good of the congregation on all the decisions they made. As President, Jenn Whitaker has been very data driven and science based. At the same time she exudes compassion and does everything with an authentic smile. We are fortunate to have her as our President in these times. The Worship Committee went way beyond their normal duties and put in a lot of extra hours learning new technology and just doing more.

Moving Forward

As your minister, I need to get back to the basics of ministry. It starts with being a pastoral, non-anxious presence amidst all the chaos and change. We have been traumatized, alienated, isolated and fractured. As a congregation we need to get back to building relationship with each other and becoming a people, a group, living out the rich covenant of our faith. I know we can. Together we will.

I think the congregation is in a good spot, not an ideal spot, but a good and stable spot for me to take my sabbatical next year, January through May.