

Forums Advancement Ministry and Unity Group 2019 Annual Reports (*combined*)

Submitted by Laura Johnstone

Active members of the group include Sandy Simon, Joan Burleigh, Cynthia Dunitz and Laura Johnstone. Founding members of The Unity Group also include Brandy Sinco, Lisa Lemble, and Barbara Lynn. The group held several forums, all of which were profoundly founded in the congregation's core values of acting as a liberal religious community grounded in love, helping each other on to search for truth in love, and committed to stewarding a nurturing and loving culture. The forums did so by providing information and perspective on how to both act in covenant and participate in actions that do so.

2019 was a year that saw the Forums Advancement Ministry and The Unity Group (inaugural year) merge together as groups with similar missions, operating the majority of the year under The Unity Group moniker.

The function of the Forums group UUAA Forums Advancement Ministry (FAM) facilitated the presentation of forums that seek to expand our understanding of the world around us, and generally includes topical content followed by moderated Q&A and discussion.

The Unity Group, formed in April of 2019, focused on the UUAA community, offering intellectual and cultural programs representing a range of religious perspectives, in an effort to expand interfaith and intercultural understanding. The group presents programming that reflects our UU principle of respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person, with a strong interest in presenting under-represented voices at UUAA.

It is interesting to note that The Unity Group is named in honor of a proud part of UUAA's history, the very successful "Unity Club" started in 19th century Ann Arbor by our then minister, Rev Jabez Sunderland. The Unity Club held public meetings with a variety of speakers on issues of the times. The program was said to bring people into a stronger sense of community and fostered positive interfaith dialog in Ann Arbor.

In early 2019 the FAM, operating on its own, hosted forums including:

- The Culture of UUAA
- Congregational perspective on the length of Worship Services and how it affects other church functions
- Climate Action featuring three perspectives on actions to positively impact climate change.

With the advent of the merge between The Unity Group and Forums Advancement Ministry, the new group created the "C3 Series" (Curiosity, Conversation and Covenant), which offered several forums first on conflict management, and learning to talk "across the divide" to people with whom you are not in agreement.

The offerings on this topic included:

A documentary that was cosponsored by The UU Justice in the Middle East group, "[Refusing to Be Enemies](#)," which documented the journey of personal transformation for a group of Arab and Jewish women, and offered living proof of, and perhaps a model to, a pathway to peace.

Later in the year The Unity Group teamed up with the Shared Ministries Team to feature a series on **Conflict Management** that explored the roots of division and polarization, and shed light on how to disagree and remain in covenant. It was taught by SMT member Reese Havlatka, who works with the UM Office of Student Conflict Management. The series was due for one more installment that was to have focused on hands-on practice of conflict resolution, but was postponed due to the coronavirus shelter in place restrictions.

Other Forums presented in 2019 included:

Cosponsored with the Challenging Racism Group, a forum on the **Multicultural Outreach Projects** in progress at UUAA, was presented by Social Justice and Pastoral Care Coordinator Quiana Perkins who shared insight into [BLUU](#) (Black Lives of UU), [DRUUMM](#) (Diverse & Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries) and the UUAA's POC (People of Color) gatherings.

Also cosponsored with the Challenging Racism Group was a presentation by Washtenaw County **Poor People's Campaign**, to update the UUAA congregation on opportunities to join in coalition with other groups fighting injustice on many fronts in the community.

On hold until post-covid19 are forums about the impact of immigration policy on a local community, and Part 3 of the Conflict Management series. It is the intent of this group to hold several additional forums when the situation permits, and to bring groups together by co-sponsoring these future events.