

Music Ministries at UUAA 2019-20 Annual Report

Chalice Singers

Director of Worship and Music Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout leads the music ministries at UUAA, and serves as the director of the Chalice Singers, who rehearse weekly from Sept. through May. As with all the music ensembles, in-person meetings were suspended by mid-March 2020. This happened just days before the greatly anticipated 6th annual BIGsing, with special musical guest Melanie DeMore. While the cancellation was sad, it demonstrated the commitment of the music leadership to guard the health and safety of all involved.

The Chalice Singers are supported by an active team of volunteers from within the ensemble, who assist with score preparation, social events, the BIG sing, sectional rehearsals, and program note writing for the Order of Service. Of note is the work of the congregation's pianist-in-residence, Allison Halerz; Allison is most visible during Sunday worship but plays a vital collaborative role in rehearsals for the Chalice Singers, not only as pianist, but sectional leader and occasional conductor.

In early 2020, a new, lay-staffed **Music Ambassadors (MA) Team** was formed to serve the broader UUAA community as a resource in responding to questions or feedback related to our Music Program. Team members are selected by and report to the Director of Worship and Music to serve staggered three-year terms. The first MA Team includes Jim McCargar and Kristin LeSueur (co-leaders), Deana Shields, and Priscilla Spencer. Beginning in April 2020 the MA Team began coordinating weekly Chalice Singer zoom meetings and rehearsals to continue to provide opportunities for this community to gather until in-person choir returns.

Music at UUAA continues to grow each year; the Chalice Singers now number over 70 voices. Beyond the choir, the sound of the voices of this congregation singing on any given Sunday, and the appearance of a variety of guest instrumentalists and singers throughout the year, is clear evidence of how essential music is to the spiritual well-being of First UUAA.

Chalice Sparks

The Chalice Sparks children's choir is a thriving part of the music ministries at UUAA. There are approximately 20-25 kids between 3rd and 8th grade registered for the choir. They bring their enthusiasm to rehearsal weekly from Sept. through May. Parent volunteers are essential to the success of this program, and the Chalice Sparks are fortunate to have many dedicated parents who step up to help with supporting rehearsals, organizing activities for the kids during services on the Sundays they are singing, and coordinating social gatherings.

Beginning in September 2019, Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout has been the primary director of the ensemble, assisted by Theresa Rohlck, director of the Chalice Bells Handbell Choir. From time to time, pianist-in-residence Allison Halerz also joins the Sparks' leadership team. While rehearsing in-person was cut short in March 2020, the group has continued to meet periodically via Zoom.

Theresa has introduced the choir to the handchimes; learning this new instrument and incorporating chimes into the repertoire has been a challenge the kids have eagerly taken on, including a new work written for the choir by

Dr. Rideout (*Silence My Soul*, for piano, chorus, and hand chimes). In the coming year, the kids will have a chance to collaboratively create a piece in which they add parts they have composed themselves.

Chalice Bells

The Chalice Bells, under the direction of Theresa Rohlck, rehearse weekly Sept. - Dec. and January - May. The group welcomes new musicians to the community of ringers in September and January. The Chalice Bells are present in worship several times a year and continue to collaborate with the Chalice Sparks and the Chalice Singers. The group continues to grow in its musicality, and in its willingness to take on new challenges of more difficult repertoire involving a variety of techniques and styles of playing. The Chalice Bells hosted the Detroit Handbell Ensemble in December 2019; the free concert was made possible by donations from several UUAA congregants who had long established connections with the Chalice Bells. We hope this will grow into an annual event.

While the final two appearances in worship in Spring 2020 were not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the group has met weekly via Zoom and has experimented with some virtual rehearsal techniques. At its foundation, this group of 14 musicians exemplifies our UU 7th principle: the choir is indeed an interdependent and interconnected web of existence, whether we meet in person or online; without the true sense of community exemplified by this group, the music would not be possible.

MUSIC@UUAA and the Association for UU Music Ministries (AUUMM)

Last year, our Congregation accepted an invitation from the Association for UU Music Ministries (AUUMM) to host their 2020 conference. The conference welcomes nearly 300 staff and volunteer music leaders, ministers, and religious professionals from the span of Unitarian Universalism. This conference is the Association's most active hub for peer-to-peer learning and dialogue, professional development, and resource exchange. This invitation is an honor for any community, as it is extended to music programs of health and high regard. Of note, the Association extended UUAA an invitation with hopes of learning more about the deeply-collaborative worship planning process here. As congregations across the denomination explore what it means to craft services as a team, our community has come to be known as a leading resource for learning, and offers wisdom from seven years of successes, shortfalls, and deep reflection.

Due to the extended COVID-19 precautions in place, the AUUMM annual conference planning team has cancelled this year's conference, inviting our community to host the conference in 2021.

authors: rev. Theresa Rohlck, Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout