

Annual Report – May 2020

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

The unattributed English expression “may you live in interesting times” feels particularly apt as, in this moment, I sit at home under continued State of Michigan “shelter in place” orders, writing my second annual report to our community. In parallel, UUAA is about a month and a half into having virtual-only Sunday services and our Board of Trustees is preparing for our community’s first ever virtual-only Annual Meeting.

This incredibly rapid re-tooling of our community, born out of necessity, is a testament to the profound dedication of our staff and volunteers; none of this would have been possible without many, many hours of securing new hardware and software, learning how it all works, developing processes and structures to support new and different modes of interaction, and then developing the substantive programs, services, and activities that are needed to maintain our sense of connection to one another. It has been an intensive and tiring set of tasks for all involved – and, we have collectively risen to meet these challenges in spades.

Many learnings have been emerging, and no doubt will continue to emerge. We have learned that there is a national and even international level of interest in what we, at UUAA, are doing locally. Our virtual-only services have been streamed across the nation, and even the world. The extent to which this has been true is nothing short of jaw dropping. We have had over 13,000 discrete points of interaction with our brand new YouTube content over a five to six week period! This is an average of 2000+ interactions per week – a level of virtual engagement in UUAA’s original spiritual programming and content that far exceeds previous levels of in-person only engagement.

We have heard, unequivocally, that individuals in our community feel like they can access virtual participation in UUAA’s small groups and meetings in a way that allows them to better juggle parenting, work, commuting, and other personal needs and responsibilities. We have heard community members say that they are only now able to participate in some of our core UUAA activities as those activities have become available online.

At the same time, while the State of Michigan will not be ‘open for business’ until sometime around the actual date of our Annual Meeting, in the absence of a vaccine for the coronavirus and/or widespread effective testing and treatment, it is probable that some individuals will be highly selective about what in-person activities they choose to participate in, especially larger group gatherings. This likely means that UUAA is inching towards some period of time during which we will need to offer the opportunity to participate in groups, meetings, activities, and services both in-person and virtually, in what I am referring to as a ‘hybrid era’ of both in-person and virtual participation. If this proves to be the case, it will involve a whole new period of technological and logistical re-tooling for us, as a community, as the processes, structures, and technologies needed to do this well are not yet in place.

As everything described above implies, this has, so far, been a year that has involved unbudgeted and yet absolutely necessary expenses in order to meet the needs of the day, and such unexpected costs will continue as we step into this emerging ‘hybrid era.’ As a trained economist, I am conservative with numbers, and so I hold some nervousness regarding our community’s financial outlook. Even as that is true, we should recognize our Interim Administrator Ed Lynn as critical in helping our community receive first-round funding in the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) ‘payroll

protection plan.’ Given how quickly the SBA ran out of money in the first round, this is nothing short of a financial miracle! I offer Ed my deepest gratitude, and hope that you will join me in extending the same to him. Without the SBA coronavirus relief funding, our community’s financial outlook for FY 2020 might have been difficult. Instead, with that funding in hand and barring any additional disasters or calamities, we have a chance to preserve the jobs of our community’s talented and dedicated staff in FY 2020. There may be strong headwinds that our nation, as a whole, may still need to navigate for FY 2021, and as we move deeper into the current fiscal year, I trust that each person connected to the UUAA family will do their level best to support us through whatever may yet emerge.

I want to also extend my deepest appreciation to our UUAA Board of Trustees. They are helping successfully shepherd us towards a conclusion of a visioning process that has spanned two congregational years. This has been an incredibly exciting project to witness our community engage in – a process of articulating how we, collectively, see our UUAA values coalescing into action for the next generation and beyond. It fills my heart, tremendously, to see the love and commitment that has gone into this process, helping ensure that every person who wished to have their ideas considered, of all ages and demographics, could have the opportunity to have that happen. I am hopeful that our UUAA community’s articulation of its vision will meaningfully guide us for years to come.

I am appending to this report my senior ministry ‘work plan’ for our 2019-2020 congregational year, which was developed collaboratively with our Board of Trustees (Addendum A). Aside from the tremendous up-ending that COVID-19 has posed, good progress has been made in all of the focus areas mentioned in this plan. It is worth noting that the Board and I have had the chance to engage in the Shared Leadership Assessment process that we jointly developed during the prior congregational year, and that this process is serving as a healthy structure for two-way dialogue on mutual goals and shared accountability. (Please see ‘Addendum F’ of my May 2019 Annual Report for the full Shared Leadership Assessment document.)

As I articulated last year, one of my ongoing goals has been, and will continue to be, that of deepening the structures and processes that support our ability to be together in healthy relationship, dialogue and, more broadly, community. To that end, we launched two new Teams this year: the Living Our Values (LOV) Team and the Music Ambassadors (MA) Team. While these Teams will be familiar to many of you, their Charges are attached to this report as Addendums B and C.

In addition to that, prior to the pandemic, our staff team was making fairly good progress in adopting and/or updating existing operational policies, with a number of new or revised policies adopted this year. All policy drafts are reviewed, at a minimum, with our Board of Trustees and our Shared Ministries Team in advance of adoption, and typically we solicit feedback on policy drafts from identified stakeholders and/or the broader UUAA community. That spirit of collaboration will continue. Finalized policies are always circulated via our UUAA Weekly E-Bulletin and/or Monthly Newsletter. Please do continue to read those communications closely if this ongoing operational work is of interest.

On the personnel front, as was discussed at our January 2020 Congregational Meeting, UUAA has less FTEs (‘full time equivalent’ paid staff positions) in FY 2020 than we did in FY 2019. This has been, in part, a financial necessity, but we are also ‘right sizing’ our staff team and, in parallel, discerning what positions/roles we may need in order to fulfill our community’s vision for the future. It is worth noting, as I have previously shared, that UUAA has one of the lowest FTEs for a Unitarian Universalist community of our size. Our staff team is quite small, relative to the size and needs of our community, but it is mighty! Our staff team is flush with nationally recognized leaders in their professional fields –

this is something that we should collectively take great pride in. Acknowledging that, in the months ahead, I will roll out an initial reconfiguration of our staff team, to accommodate its smaller size in the second half of FY 2020. I anticipate that further adjustments to this initial plan will take place in FY 2021, as we digest and learn from this initial recalibration. More information will follow, in the summer of 2020.

Last but not least, I want to express my heartfelt love and gratitude for each of you. The depth of love that flows in our community, so earnestly and well, is palpable to me. That warmth - guided by thoughtfulness, care, and wisdom – is the heart and soul of who we are together at the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor. I absolutely love being in community with you! In turn, thank you for so generously and graciously sharing your lives with me. May all of that love and goodwill continue to support and nurture us as we move towards our third year together.

ADDENDUM A

(Previously published in the November 2019 UUAA Monthly Newsletter.)

Senior Minister's Goals and Workplan for 2019-2020

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 2019-2020 congregational year:

- 1) Deepen and help articulate shared staff team understandings and staff team structures, in support of longer-term sustainability and stability on the staff team. This will be worked on by:
 - Leading staff team reflection, conversation, and articulation of the ways in which the team is relating to and bringing alive our core UUAA values;
 - Supporting the wider UUAA community in understanding how our core UUAA values inform and guide everything that the staff team is doing;
 - Partnering with the UUAA Board Working Group on Personnel to continue improving and refining our documentation related to employment practices and expectations, including shared reflection on the longer-term staffing structures that are affordable and sustainable for UUAA; and,
 - Leading/guiding any necessary staffing reconfigurations/reimaginings that support UUAA's vision, UUAA's core values, and the goals of staffing sustainability and affordability, in collaboration/consultation with the Board.

- 2) Continue to develop and deepen Sunday service experiences in which the majority of attendees regularly have a meaningful and engaging experience. This will be worked on by:
 - Participating in regular weekly planning sessions with UUAA's Worship Team;
 - Soliciting and integrating lay suggestions/ideas/questions related to monthly service themes into our future Sunday service planning;
 - Continuing to proactively solicit congregational feedback related to our Sunday services;
 - Beginning to deepen congregational capacity for lay participation in, and leadership of, our Sunday services, through the offering of a 7 month-long skills building seminar in public story-telling; and,
 - Supporting the worship team in living into the values that the team has articulated for our Sunday services (shared with our UUAA community in the spring of 2019).

- 3) Support the Board of Trustees in implementing a plan that moves UUAA towards articulating a vision for the congregation and, emerging out of that, strategic priorities. This will be worked on by:
 - Participating in and supporting a Board-led work plan that helps the congregation complete its visioning process; and,
 - Supporting the congregation, and its leadership, in articulating the top 2-3 strategic priorities emerging from this vision.

- 4) Establish the newly forming Living Our Values (LOV) Team, in supporting healthy, covenant-based relationship within the congregation, and the Shared Ministries Team (SMT), in supporting healthy communication and processes within the congregation. This will be worked on by:

- Creating, recruiting for, and sharing with the UUAA community the development of the new Living Our Values (LOV) Team;
- Helping develop and refine appropriately differentiated operational understandings for both the LOV Team and the SMT, by sharing knowledge, best practices, and guidance, as needed;
- Developing and/or revising written charges for both these teams; and,
- Establishing regular ongoing meetings with the chairs/co-chairs of these teams, in order to support the teams in their response to issues, questions, and feedback.

ADDENDUM B

(Previously shared with the congregation in the November 2019 UUAA Monthly Newsletter and during the 11/24/19 Sunday service.)

Living Our Values (LOV) Team Framing Document

"... this is our covenant with each other: to dwell together in peace, to search for truth in love, and to help one another..."

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the lay-staffed "Living Our Values" (LOV) Team is to serve as partners in building, maintaining, and repairing congregational relationships to ensure that we are living in alignment with our UUAA covenant.

ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES:

The work of the LOV Team will reflect UUAA and UU values, and the congregation's governing policies, and will seek to strengthen the shared covenant-based fabric of our community.

The LOV Team, and its members, will remain fair-minded in matters related to congregational life, not serving as a representative for individual congregants, the staff, the ministers, specific program areas of the congregation, or specific subgroups of the congregation. The needs of the UUAA community, as a whole, will always be held first and foremost at the center of all that the LOV Team does.

The LOV Team is committed to supporting and nurturing healthy, right relationship, and for embodying and modeling the fact that our community cares when harm has been caused, whether intentional or not, whether initially recognized or not.

The LOV Team honors the confidentiality of its internal reflection and deliberation processes, while committed to the transparency of information sharing and outcomes.

The Team will engage in its work of supporting covenant-based relationality through three modalities:

- Supporting covenant-based relationship **in the absence of** harm or conflict, through such proactive, skills-building activities as workshops, seminars, and discussion circles, among other possibilities.
- Addressing potential or actual harm **in the moment**, serving as proactive bystanders and reminders of healthy covenant and mutual care.
- Serving as facilitators and guides who assist/support the conversation, healing, re-committal to covenant, and affirmation of love & care that is sometimes needed **after harm has been caused**.

SELECTION PROCESS & ACCOUNTABILITY:

The LOV Team will engage in the described roles and responsibilities as a **community of practice**. Recognizing that everyone possesses different skills and expertise, LOV is a team that is committed to reflecting, learning, and acting together, over time. Because this team functions as a 'community of practice,' rotation on/off the team will include a process of invitation and discernment in conversation with the chair, or co-chairs, of the team and/or the senior minister. We will strive to flexibly welcome in those who are committed to this work, and provide ways to graciously release those who need to move on, with an eye towards helping, over time, as many people as possible deepen their covenant-based skillfulness. This team reports to the senior minister and will submit a periodic report on its activities to the congregation's Board of Trustees, as is helpful or requested.

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES:

It is anticipated that while the LOV Team will focus on matters relating to healthy relationship and the healthy embodiment of our UUAA covenant, there is often no way to discuss healthy relationship and interpersonal dynamics without also discussing the very specific programmatic or operational matters which are often the context in which relationship has gone awry. As such, while the LOV Team has primary responsibility for "right relationship" and covenant-based issues and the Shared Ministries Team (SMT) has lead on operational policies, processes, and communication, it is anticipated that both teams will work as closely together as is needed, modeling healthy, ongoing communication, collaboration, and when appropriate, joint action between the two groups.

ADDENDUM C

(Previously shared with the congregation in the February 2020 UUAA Weekly E-Bulletins and during the 2/16/20 Sunday service.)

Music Ambassadors (MA) Team Framing Document

*"... this is our covenant with each other: to dwell together in peace, to search for truth in love,
and to help one another..."*

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the lay-staffed Music Ambassadors (MA) Team is to serve our broader UUAA community as a resource in responding to questions or feedback related to our Music Program.

ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES:

The work of the MA Team will reflect UUAA and UU values and will seek to strengthen the shared covenant-based fabric of our community.

The MA Team is committed to supporting and nurturing healthy relationship and shared understandings about UUAA's vibrant and dynamic Music Program, serving as a resource to congregants who have questions or feedback about such. The MA Team will work directly with the Director of Worship and Music, and as useful/needed with the Senior Minister in consultation with the Director of Worship and Music.

The members of the MA Team are selected by the Director of Worship and Music, with an eye towards embodying on the Team a breadth, depth, and knowledge of UUAA's Music Program that will serve our broader community well.

The MA Team honors the confidentiality of its internal reflection processes, while committed to the transparency of information sharing and outcomes.

SELECTION PROCESS & ACCOUNTABILITY:

Members of the MA Team will be selected by the Director of Worship and Music, who will consult with the Senior Minister or their designee in the selection process of team members. Committee members will serve 3-year staggered terms. The committee will be composed of members who have a broad knowledge of UUAA's music program and music activities, are generally trusted by the congregation and its members, and can be relied on to keep the best interests of the full congregation at the heart of their work. The specific number of committee members will be determined by the Director of Worship and Music, based on the workload and needs of the team. The committee will report to the Director of Worship and Music.

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES:

While it is anticipated that the MA Team will focus on matters relating to UUAA's Music Program, it is recognized that presenting questions/issues are often multi-faceted, reflecting multiple needs or domains. As such, while the MA Team will have primary responsibility for questions and feedback related to our Music Program, there may be times when this Team will work collaboratively with the Shared Ministries Team (SMT) and/or the Living Our Values (LOV) Team, and other times when an issue/matter may be fully handed off to one of these other teams for further action or response.