

## UUAA Community Walk and Talk 2020-21 Annual Report

The Community Walk and Talk get togethers are a new activity, stemming from the pandemic lockdown. Leadership and planning was provided by UUAA's *Outdoors Women* group, until UU Community Walks became its own group. This year the UUAA building was closed and congregants had very little opportunity to get together, other than on Zoom.

In November, 2020, Welcome Ministries Coordinator Hannah Hotchkiss and Congregational Life Coordinator QuianaDenae Perkins began recruiting lay leaders to plan walks in the parks and neighborhoods around Ann Arbor for the day after Thanksgiving. Hannah Hotchkiss also organized small group hikes on the UUAA property around this same time. This seemed to connect members of our congregation to each other in a way that they very much needed during the pandemic, so volunteer leaders stepped up to continue organizing walks in 2021 beginning with first day walks on January 1st.

This led to a desire to offer more types of group activities outdoors including: walks, strolls, or rolls (wheelchair/strollers), where small groups of UUAA congregants could mask up and meet outdoors for a bit of exercise and conversation. Small group hosts usually decided where and how long the walks would be. Leaders and hosts tried to make sure there were activities for everyone -- some walks were kid-friendly, pet-friendly, wheelchair or walker accessible, etc. Some were short walks with benches for resting, some multi-mile hikes over varied terrain. Anyone in the community could go to a SignupGenius page and see the walk choices for each month.

Walk locations varied throughout the Ann Arbor / Ypsi area and beyond. They included Gallup Park, Argo Park, Leslie Science and Nature Center, North Bay Park, Matthei Botanical Gardens, Nichols Arboretum, Saginaw Forest, Frog Island, and the Border to Border trail in Chelsea, and many more.

Some walks were on specific occasions: Jan 1st, first day of Spring & March 14th (Pi Day) for example.

Some walks had additional purposes. In February there was a collaboration with the Racial Justice Arc to hold walks in the historically black neighborhoods of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti and then hold Zoom conversations to talk about what we learned. On International Women's Day a group toured outdoor art by women that can be found on the University of Michigan Campus. On Pi Day a group hiked 3.14 miles in Gallup Park. Getting out in nature with a small group led many of us to find new places in our cities to enjoy the interconnected web of existence in our community.

As pandemic precautions eased and weather heated up, participation in the walks decreased and at the end of May we suspended the walks. We will re-evaluate the popular demand for more walks in September.

Vision 20/50-- While the walks are primarily about the strengthening community aspect of the Congregational Vision, they supported other parts of the vision as well. The walks in historically black neighborhoods raised awareness of the history of racism in our communities. Certainly all of the walks set an example of a radically welcome culture by actively working to include all ages, gender identities and ability levels in the walks and adapting to their needs. In future, we may add guided walks on the UUAA property to talk about some of the landscaping goals for UUAA's Green Sanctuary 2030 program.

Submitted by Sandy Eyl, S.O. (super organizer) and Sandy Simon