

Senior Minister Annual Report – 2021-22

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

As I write this year's annual report, the world and our nation feel even more frayed than at other, stress-filled times during this pandemic. As a nation, we have just navigated the racial hatred fueled massacre of primarily Black persons in Buffalo, NY and the senseless murder of young children in Uvalde, TX. All of this is simultaneous to the potential repeal of Roe v. Wade, the further political and civic implications that ruling could have, and societal trends toward autocracy, xenophobia, racism, and the increasing cultural acceptance of denying science and even facts. Further, these social-civic currents rest within the larger context of human-caused climate instability and increasing climate-related devastation. To say that we are living in a time unlike any other would not just be true, but perhaps an understatement in relation to the emotional, spiritual, and physical impact these realities have on all of us. We are exhausted - on many levels - of the pandemic, yes, but also by what increasingly seems like a never-ending stream of crises that demand our emotional, political, and personal attention.

Given this context, I would first and foremost like to lift up the practically heroic efforts of our small and mighty UUAA staff team. Even as our team of paid professionals is the smallest it has been in quite some time, this group of dedicated individuals has been consistently working far beyond their compensated hours to ensure that pastoral care, Sunday services, and other critical, mission-imperative needs within our community have not been short-changed. We have the finest professional staff that I have ever had the privilege of working with within Unitarian Universalism, and I hope and trust that our wider UUAA community can see and appreciate that, as well. This team is further enhanced by several unpaid, volunteer staff members who offer their love and care to our community through service: Debita Graham, Robert Graham, Colleen Crawley, Carolyn Barber, Scott Ferguson, and of course, Ed Lynn. Honoring the skill and dedication of our UUAA staff team, I encourage you to please reach out, send an email, send a hand-written note (whatever works), letting individual staff team members know that you appreciate them, and/or that they have touched your heart in some way. Holding on to gifted staff is not a given in today's labor-short environment, and our talented professionals go above and beyond - every day - for our UUAA community, because of their love for and commitment to our community. I thank the staff team for their immense hard work, and hope that you, members of our wider UUAA community, might join me in that.

As we look ahead, UUAA is continuing to adjust to the lived realities of a significantly smaller staff team. This means, in part, that certain functions related to building, grounds, and rooms usage that were previously handled by professional staff, can no longer be managed in the same way. In the year ahead, individuals and groups that wish to use UUAA's grounds and premises, will have to take a higher degree of ownership over access to the grounds and building and the cleanliness and set-up of such. We are in the midst of adjusting operational buildings/grounds access policies and procedures to reflect this, and will share more about this during our upcoming Congregational Meeting.

Next, I offer my personal, heartfelt gratitude to Interim Administrator Ed Lynn for seven years of volunteer service to our UUAA community, as he 'retires' from a position that is almost always professionally staffed and compensated, typically at the senior staff-level. I have not just personally learned much from Ed, I feel as if he has pastored to me, and mentored me, any number of times, in a variety of ways, as I have settled into my professional role within the community. Ed will be deeply

missed on our staff team - he is a Dad/Granddad-type role model to many of us on the staff team - and his gifts of service to our community should be treasured: not every UU congregant has the skills, means, or desire to work full-time, for free, for their community for such an extended and indefinite period of time. Thank you, Ed! We love you and are so grateful for you.

Side by side with that reflection, I am delighted to share that UUAA had a fairly robust pool of applicants to choose from for our Administrator position. We are close to publicly announcing the results of this search process, and hope to share more with you very soon. As we run up to that, it is amply clear that the new Administrator will need to develop multiple lay committees that they will closely collaborate with. While UUAA had a robust Stewardship Committee pre-pandemic, that committee needs to be rebuilt and fashioned into something more like a lay led Stewardship and Development Committee, with responsibilities for annual fundraising, planned giving, and capital campaigns. In addition, UUAA has not had a Building and Grounds Committee in recent years, and the need for such is increasingly apparent. In support of developing such lay participation and collaboration, I would like to extend an invitation: if the possibility of working with our new Administrator on these types of issues/needs might feel meaningful and impactful to you, please proactively reach out to me and let me know. I will be personally supporting our new Administrator in assembling these teams in the year ahead.

Last but not least, I would like to invite you to please keep an eye/ear/antenna out for upcoming “church of the future” conversations and dialogue. Over the past 2.5 years, our congregation, like many other communities, has moved through immense structural, practical, and values-based adjustments. For example, our community was not really doing much of anything virtually, pre-pandemic, and now many UUAA meetings include virtual participation as an option, such as our Congregational Meetings. In addition, our Sunday services, which used to only have one mode of engagement (in-person) now have three forms of engagement (in-person, livestreaming, and on-demand). All of this has shifted rapidly and is still evolving. What do all these shifts mean for UUAA in the years ahead? Where are the strategic opportunities in the midst of all this; the opportunities that will help ensure UUAA’s relevance and attractiveness for future generations? These are powerful, orientation-setting conversations that we hope to move more deeply into in the year ahead. Please stay tuned.

As I look toward beginning my fifth year of service with our UUAA community, my heart is full of gratitude. My family and I love UUAA, and our wider Ann Arbor community. I am grateful that we are in this very special UU context together, and look forward to all that we will continue to do to deepen Unitarian Universalism’s impact in each of our lives and the wider world. We UUs are a people committed to the highest of human aspirations, and it is a privilege to be in community alongside you, in service to that ideal.

ADDENDUM A

(Previously published in the November 2021 UUAA Monthly Newsletter)

Senior Ministry Goals for the 2021-2022 Congregational Year

Continuing to live in a time of inherent complexity and uncertainty, goals/plans for the current congregational year are contingent on assumptions which may or may not hold as the year unfolds, such as: UUAA's infrastructure (building, grounds, equipment, etc.) and activities will not be adversely impacted by weather events, civil unrest, acts of hate, or significantly disrupted supply chains; the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic will continue to gradually lessen and abate in 2022; UUAA will maintain multi-modal access to activities and programs in 2022; and, the financial impact to UUAA of pandemic era-related economic and labor supply pressures will be modest-to-moderate and institutionally manageable.

Given these assumptions, 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 2021-2022 congregational year:

- 1) Guiding & leading UUAA through this pandemic time and beyond as our community's senior spiritual leader. This will be worked on by:
 - Integrating spiritual engagement with UUAA's 2050 vision, mission, and priorities with our Sunday services; and,
 - Identifying and supporting adult-focused opportunities to deepen one's engagement with the spiritual themes reflected in UUAA's 2050 vision, mission, and priorities.

- 2) Supporting UUAA in moving towards longer-term operational sustainability, affordability, and stability, in alignment with UUAA's 2050 vision, mission, and priorities. This will be worked on by:
 - Supporting the development and launch, in 2022, of a Comprehensive Campaign that will directly strengthen UUAA's long-term financial health and stability;
 - Partnering with the UUAA Working Group on Personnel in a comprehensive update of the UUAA Employee Manual (personnel practices handbook), with an eye towards sustainable, employment-related best practices; and,
 - Continuing to foster and nurture UUAA's commitment to collaborative leadership as a vision-based, institution-wide goal, including across staff and lay leadership teams.

- 3) Supporting UUAA as it navigates multiple, significant institutional transitions. This will be worked on by:
 - Convening UUAA's COVID-19 Advisory Team, in support of implementing pandemic era-related ongoing (and evolving) best practice, science-based health and safety measures for our UUAA community;
 - Supporting the sustainable transition of our Sunday services to multi-modal access (which includes in-person, livestreaming, and on demand modalities), ongoing upgrades to UUAA's technology and software, and the development of team-based processes to support multi-modality; and,

- Nurturing and/or mentoring new and 'Acting' staff members, as well as identifying permanent, ongoing professional staffing of UUAA's religious education, music, administration, and communication functions.