

Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley

2019-2020 Annual Report

Revs. Christian Schmidt & Kristin Grassel Schmidt, Co-Ministers

It has been a tumultuous year – a pandemic that forced us to shut down our church building for months, the announcement of our impending departure as co-ministers, the deaths of beloved members, to give just a few examples. In future years, this 2019-2020 church year will be remembered for the virus that is running around the globe, but we also want to highlight a few other notable highlights of the year.

Notable accomplishments

There have been notable accomplishments this year. We have hired Tess O’Riva as executive director, and already her work here has shown how valuable it is and will be going forward. Catherine Boyle joined us as Acting Director of Family Ministry and will continue in her work, made both more challenging and ever more important by the changes this pandemic has forced upon us. More recently, we have added Antonio Toro as facilities manager, and Charis Domador as connections coordinator, and their contributions have already made a big difference.

We have explored new ways of using our campus this year to help our wider community in furtherance of our mission. Notably, we hosted a person experiencing homelessness for several months this fall and winter, and we have provided temporary space for tiny houses until they can be installed in their permanent location by our partner, Youth Spirit Artworks. This work along with similar projects will be vital if this congregation intends to stay in its current location for the long term.

A leadership development program, the first intentional program of its kind in many years at UUCB, was led by Rev. Kristin, Carla McCasland and Kathryn Jay. It took a dozen leaders through a process designed to prepare them for lay leadership in our congregation or other organizations, so that we have a pool of prepared people for our leadership positions going into the future.

The pandemic

Over the course of a couple days, we went from hearing vague information about how a virus was spreading to implementing shelter-in-place restrictions that effectively closed our church campus. A team, led by ministers, worship associates and tech volunteers, implemented online live-streaming worship in a matter of four days, meaning we didn’t miss a single Sunday morning. Since, we have worked to refine our technical work and liturgy to best utilize the new format and worked to expand the team producing weekly worship. It seems clear that there will be no going back; even when UUCB can resume in-person worship, livestreamed online worship will be a part of congregational life going forward.

Our departure

As we shared with the congregation in mid-April, we will be leaving UUCB this summer. Rev. Kristin will become the minister at a church near where she grew up in Maryland, and our family will be close to extended family and our support system. Though

the process of considering this opportunity started months before the pandemic, it is both unfortunate in timing to leave during this emergency, but also clearer than ever how important it is for us to make this move. We are confident UUCB will be well served by its next minister and wish this congregation the very best for its future.

Concerns for the future

UUCB's financial picture, like that of almost all organizations in the current climate, is unclear moving forward, and will require continuous care in coming months and years. Cuts will almost certainly have to be made as income streams are affected by the pandemic and related financial events.

None of us know what the future will hold, but this congregation can face that future knowing it has many resources: a community of talented, committed people; financial resources about which difficult but empowering decisions will need to be made; a truly excellent staff team; a campus that would be the envy of many organizations and is now more accessible than ever with improvements to the A/V system and the installation of a ramp from the floor of the sanctuary to the chancel. With such resources and a clear mission to serve our members and larger communities, this congregation is poised for great things in the future.

In faith,
Revs. Christian Schmidt and Kristin Grassel Schmidt

Endowment Committee

Members:

Lenore Ralston (Chair), Anita Mermel, Ira Nelken, Lenore Ralston (chair), Dick Sherman, Susan Singh, Grace Ulp, Larry Nagel, Treasurer *ex officio*, Linda Laskowski, consulting.

New Members: Anita Mermel ; Dick Sherman

Status of UUCB Endowment (UUA):

- All UUCB accounts show a loss, in part due to money used for Maintenance and Church operating funds, and in part due to Pandemic-related stock declines.
- UUCB withdrew \$525,000 of \$908,000 approved by the Congregation.
- The overall percent decline in our General Endowment, only, was ~44% between FY2017 -> March 30, 2020.
- \$169,000 in earnings are left in the General Endowment Fund.

Gift/Bequests 2019-2020:

- Roger Thompson (Estate) (\$29,538.20)

Endowment Committee Work:

WAKE NOW OUR VISION: Our last payout of **\$33,256.25 will come in July, 2020**. Total award: **\$133,025**.

Board approved Term Limits for those serving on the Endowment Committee: 3 year term; renewable for 6 years total.

Endowment Committee Members also served as follows:

Grace Ulp, Ira Nelken – Fiscal Oversight Committee

Ira Nelken, Lenore Ralston – Building Oversight Committee

Susan Singh – Maybeck Society

Dick Sherman – Representative of the Endowment Committee on the Finance Committee (headed by Larry Nagel; to be convened)

Anita Mermel – Endowment Representative on the re-write of the Governance Manual

Family Ministry

This past year, Family Ministry dug deep and planted some seeds that will bear fruit

- **Catherine joined as ADFM in August**
- **Pier and Colleen trained thirteen teachers for Religious Education teachers and substitutes including safety walkthroughs.** FM is glad to be linking arms with folks from all the committees to be co-hosting a Volunteer Training Summit in the Fall (pending, due to pandemic)
- **We started our soft launch into R3 recommendations.** We opened two Praygrounds: one in the Sanctuary and one in the Social Hall. Kids now have quiet activities (like coloring and reading) as well as toys, their own beanbags and most importantly they are blossoming. What a joy it is to be next to a child singing their heart out and to look over and realize that they aren't singing off the screen, they know the hymns' lyrics.
- **Continuing our soft launch for R3, we had at least one Celebration Chapel and one Multigenerational service a month.** We collaborated with different committees to create meaningful accessible worship for all ages. We made worship engaging through creativity and learned a lot along the way (especially when you go back in time to 1892 with no power!)
- **We learned that we need a set schedule for RE Sundays.** For example, having RE class every first and third Sunday instead of assigning the class days based on variable data.
- **Longtime Childcare Coordinator Mary-Lynn left to take some well-deserved rest and kick up her heels, FM hired Jeffrey in the late fall.** Jeffrey left the last week of February to pursue a full time opportunity and we wished him well. The hiring process for this is currently paused.

- **We had a smashing good time (with lots of pumpkins and no smasing!) for Field Day with** pumpkin decorating, face painting, bouncy houses, delicious food and fun for all.
- **Our 4th, 5th and 6th graders OWL class learned about their bodies, boundaries and making safe and healthy choices.**
- **We learned how to make a labyrinth! Also in December we did not set the church on fire on Christmas Eve thanks to our excellent greeters/fire marshalls.**
- **We worked with the SJ Committee on the Food Drive and with El Cerrito's MLK Jr Day Parade.**
- **We hosted a Youth retreat in February, building bridges with our fellow UU youth.**
- **We learned a lot about our faith and ourselves from and with our super RE teachers.** Some things we learned: the K-1 class grew their own vegetables, still safe from monching deer and bunnies behind a wired fence, 2-3 and 4-5 make Valentine's Day Cards for leaders to remind them what is important to children and youth, and dove into the rich tapestry of world faiths with MS and HS.
- **We entered into March, ready for Easter- then the pandemic happened- despite that, we still had Easter.** Thanks to Jim Gasperini for finding an online Easter Egg hunt, figuring out how to make it work for our website and all the volunteers to safely pack and deliver prizes to make this very strange Easter somewhat normal for our children and youth.
- **We adapted to online worship, RE classes (currently ADFM is leading these), and the new world we found ourselves in.** We have Chalice Circles for Children, Youth and Parents/Caregivers, a monthly packet of spiritual activities to nourish the heart and mind, and are currently planning for the Fall with multiple options depending on what the state says.
- **We link arms with our fellow members of UUCB in hope and solidarity as we go forward together.**

Music Department

During the 2019-2020 season, the Music Department performed at the Solano Stroll, sang at 30 worship services, including the children's choir performances, especially our first ever youth concert with soloists.

During the lockdown, we held weekly choir practices remotely, and recorded the organist, the music director's piano performances, and soloists for broadcast on Sunday services.

FUND RAISERS 2019-2020 SEASON

Side by Side by Sondheim, September 27-29, 2019

Youth & Families Holiday Concert, December 8, 2019

Messiah Sing-along, December 22, 2019

Love Songs & Chocolate, February 1&2, 2020

Joint UU Choirs & Kensington Symphony Orchestra Concert, scheduled for April 25, 2020, postponed until Fall 2020

These music events grossed c. \$16,000 so far, well on our way to our goal of \$20,000 which we hope to fulfill when the church reopens.

Social Justice Council

Council-wide Projects and Events

At the July Social Justice Council potluck, Lonnie Moseley gave out the congregational donations collected for our graduating high school seniors: Nicholas "Rota" Maynard and Sophia Acker.

At the end of August, SJC sponsored and baked for "Cookies Not Cages", a bake sale put on in the atrium by El Cerrito Progressives that raised \$675 for East Bay Sanctuary Covenant.

Council members reached out to the Student Climate strikers at UC Berkeley on September 20 to promote the Code Pink's Peace vigil at the Creech Air force Base and our November environmental justice forum with the Pachamama Alliance. We attended the Climate Action Strike rally in Sproul Plaza, where people of all ages joined to demand decisive action by politicians and governments to save the planet and the futures of our youth.

In September, UUCB participated in the Solano Stroll, a major community event. The SJC has had our own table in the booth and organized the production of placards used in the UUCB contingent during the opening parade.

Also in September, we co-sponsored with other community organizations, the screening of *American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel*, at the Elmwood Rialto Theater in Berkeley.

In November, we screened GENERATION ZAPPED at UUCB. This award-winning film discusses the potential health risks from radiation emitted by wireless devices, as revealed by scientific research.

Also in November, the SJC and youth and parents from Family Ministry completed our Food Drive and collected 2194 pounds of food and \$4,335 to give to the Richmond Emergency Food Pantry.

2020

For January, thanks to the organizing done by our People of Color Caucus and Whites Opposed to White Supremacy, the congregation and ministers participated in the 31st annual El Cerrito Martin Luther King Jr. parade.

UUCB worked as a co-sponsor with Reclaim Our Vote on a very successful fund raiser to further the group's pre-election work to register, reinstate and get voters to the polls in five states with over 25% people of color.

We organized a postcard writing event in March to write 1500 postcards to voters in Georgia who have been purged from the voter rolls, advising the voters on how to get reinstated.

Also in March, Social Justice sponsored the documentary, the award-winning documentary, *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook*, narrated by Tony & Emmy Award winning actor Jeffrey Wright. *Rigged* reveals the frightening details of the ten-year political effort to turn back the rising demographic tide of minority voters by using a variety of voter suppression tactics. Following the screening, a panel discussion took place with Mac Heller, *Rigged's* executive producer, UCB Professor Ian Haney Lopez, an expert on race and constitutional law, and Joel Bridgeman, managing partner of Oakland's Community Engagement Services.

In April, Social Justice, in cooperation with the Membership Committee, rented *American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel*, a documentary about liberal faith congregations in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and made it available through the UUCB Facebook page, since we were living under the Stay-At-Home order. The film was followed by an online discussion with the people involved in making the film.

All through the year, as we have done for many years now at GRIP, UUCB volunteers prepared and served lunch on the fourth Tuesday of every month, and also served dinner to shelter residents on the fourth Saturday of the month. We also organized two clothing drives this year for GRIP residents. These activities are currently on hold during the virus pandemic.

Confronting Racism and Oppression Project

People of Color Caucus (POCC) & Whites Opposed to White Supremacy (WOWS)

The POCC provides a safe space for racial and ethnic minority members to name, heal and reconcile past and current personal and group racial wounds, while supporting each other's spiritual journeys. We work to bring awareness of oppression and the needs of communities of color to our UUCB congregation. WOWS is a group of white-identified people at UUCB that examines how white supremacy culture and hallmarks of that culture limits our congregation—not only in our justice work, but also in our spiritual growth. The POCC and WOWS join in partnership with our wider congregation and other justice-seeking people to dismantle racism and all forms of oppression. We also celebrate our rich cultural heritages during services and sponsored events. Each group meets separately, and we hold joint meetings several times a year, sharing food and experiences, as well as planning projects.

POCC enriched the December 29 services with a Kwanza celebration.

UUCB's Black History Month Celebration Service and Luncheon were held on February 23. This event was a collaboration of the Social Justice Council, Family Ministry, our Music staff, one of our Chalice Groups, our Worship Associates, Rev. Kristin Schmidt and many other individuals who generously gave of their time and talents. The lively and inspiring event included music with all-church participation, a three-part story from Family Ministry including a tribute to Harriet Tubman, and a testimony, a traditional African American religious tradition. Members of neighboring African Americans churches attended. All joined in our delicious luncheon which followed the service. A special shout out to Bill Brown, barbecue chef extraordinaire, who provided us with delectable ribs, freshly grilled! The event featured outstanding music, including a solo from Pastor Annie Green from The City of the Lord Zion and inspiring stories, celebrating African American who provided leadership and inspiration throughout the history of the United States.

Directly after the Black History Month event, the POCC and WOWS held their third joint meeting. Attended by 29 members, we engaged in heartfelt discussions, as we focused on building our partnership in confronting racism. Goals were articulated, and concrete strategies proposed. Much progress was made, and we look forward to taking steps in implementing these strategies within UUCB and our wider community.

Literature, Film, and Drama Contingent

2019

JULY

Our discussion with Berkeley author Elizabeth Rosner about her book, *Survivor Café: The Legacy of Trauma and the Labyrinth of Memory*, included the hierarchy of trauma and who gets/chooses to call themselves “survivors. She also talked about new research in the field of epigenetics – the process which some researchers believe shows that trauma, for example, is inherited by subsequent generations.

AUGUST

Per our discussion of *Don't Label Me* by Irshad Manji, we started off with listing words that we have heard, read, or seen, that *others* have used to identify us. We then listed words *we* use to identify ourselves. Partnering with someone we did not know and had a conversation for about 8–10 minutes referencing our lists. We then shared points of intrigue. The essence of the book is that we should attempt to have difficult discussions with people who do not share our views.

SEPTEMBER

Lee Olivier and Jonathan Hofeld led a moving discussion of *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. It was a selection that, sadly, could not have been more appropriate at this time of rising white nationalism and unrest in our country and the world.

OCTOBER

Our Third Annual Fishbowl took place in October, where four cis- gendered women and three cis-gendered men swam separately, answering questions posed by lead fisher-person, Julie Rogers (whose work on these events is wonderful!) while the rest of us listened and ate fish food. Enjoyed most re sexism was: “Why do we say, ‘Oh boy!’ and ‘Oh man!’ but we never say, ‘Oh girl?’ or ‘Oh woman?’”

NOVEMBER

After reading *Lucky Boy*, the author, Shanti Sekaran, was able to give us added insight into her choices and development of the narrative of her diverse characters. Participants expressed their added delight at the Berkeley setting, among familiar places and local culture.

DECEMBER

We had lively discussion about *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, with Julie Rogers facilitating.

2020

JANUARY

LFDC discussed *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens, a different kind of whodunit that was a true delight

FEBRUARY

The LFDC discussed Toni Morrison's powerful and poignant first novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

MARCH

The book selection for March was *Infidel*, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

MAY

Via Zoom on May 3, we were led by Marsha Saxton editor of *Sticks & Stones: Disabled People's Stories of Abuse, Defiance and Resilience* to get a glimpse of the world as experienced by people with disabilities. Also part of our topic of discussion was *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*, now streaming on Netflix. The documentary was executive-produced by President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama.

Tiny House Project

Tiny Houses, in collaboration with **Youth Spirit Artworks** and a large coalition of other religious organizations, have led our congregation in a 2-year project to build 26 tiny houses for homeless youth. We have been storing four of the completed houses in our parking lot. The organizers are considering applying for another year as Sponsored Project as the YSA builds out the location for the tiny house community near the Coliseum in Oakland.

Climate Justice Project

In November, we held a very successful Awakening the Dreamer Symposium in collaboration with the Pachamama Alliance. The mission of the Alliance is to inspire people to work towards a socially just, environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling presence on Earth. With over 100 people in attendance and representatives from over 20 environmental groups present, we had an opportunity to look at new ways to work towards this mission. Many of those attending the Symposium are interested in returning to further the work.

On Feb. 20, the SJC hosted the Introduction to Drawdown workshop. Project Drawdown mapped and modeled the 100 most powerful solutions to global warming, and some of the solutions are quite surprising! Sixty-six people came together to share a meal, participate in the interactive program, and talk about what they can do to help implement these solutions. This event was a great follow-up to our November 9 symposium.

Good Neighbor

At our December SJC potluck, 15 Alameda and Contra Costa County nonprofits nominated by congregants made presentations to the SJC in support of their becoming recipients of UUCB's Good Neighbor donations. The recipients share each of 11 months of UUCB Good Neighbor Sunday collections during 2020. The Greater Richmond Interfaith Project (GRIP) is our recipient every year for the 12th month.

Selected were:

Crisis Support Services of Alameda County

Diverse Housing Working Group

Women's Cancer Resource Center

Emeryville Citizens Assistance P
College is Real
Youth Spirit Artworks
Interfaith Movement of Human Integrity GRIP
Read Aloud
East Bay Center for the Blind
YEAH!
Operation Dignity

Stewardship Committee

The Stewardship Committee hit the ground running this year with a lot of enthusiasm and shared learning. Together we read "The Soul of Money" by Lynne Twist as part of an effort to root our work in an understanding of money and generosity as a powerful way to promote our values in the world. We built good relationships with one another, made shared decisions, and designed a generosity campaign that honored some beloved stewardship traditions and tried new ways of engaging our more digitally focused member households. We are grateful to our Executive Director, Tess O'Riva for her assistance in developing the Bronze, Silver, and Gold budgets that defined the campaign. We are also thankful to Raymond Daigle for the time and expertise he brought to making our first ever testimonial videos, and all of the members who were featured in them. We were thrilled by how many people participated in the Baking Competition Stewardship Kick-Off and are thankful to everyone who has made a pledge for the 2020/2021 church year.

As of the writing of this report, 102 households have pledged a total of \$287,113. This represents a little less than half of the households in the congregation. We would need the remaining households to pledge a total of \$162,887 in order to reach the Bronze pledging goal of \$450,000. Due to the economic downturn we may not be able to reach that goal, but we will be working to invite all who have not yet pledged to do so if they can. It was certainly disappointing to lose momentum due to the pandemic, but we look forward to concluding the stewardship campaign by mid-June with the generous help of the Board.

If when you read this report your household has yet to make a pledge, we encourage you to do so, at whatever amount you can. And we encourage everyone who has already pledged to consider increasing your pledge or making a gift to the church of some portion of your stimulus check. This congregation has survived hard times before, including the 1906 earthquake, the 1918 flu epidemic, and many others. And if we all pull together now and give from deep within, we will be able to continue offering the life changing ministry and community that brought so many of us to UUCB in the first place. Thank you for your generosity!

Stewardship Committee
Lynne Cahoon
Michael Armstrong
Kathryn Jay
Mac Lingo
Rev. Kristin Schmidt

Tess Snook O’Riva, Executive Director

In tales of old, the hero must conquer many challenges to reach their goal. Since July 2019, we have had our share of trials. PG&E shut off the gas service to the campus (twice), we closed UUCB due to poor air quality and power outages, I had an emergency appendectomy, and then a pandemic happened. My first year at UUCB has been a gauntlet, but I have never questioned the value of the journey, especially with the companions I have discovered at my side.

Notable accomplishments

Our staffing situation has changed dramatically, from the retirement of Lissa Roos Parker as our Rentals Manager and Warren Smith as our Facilities Coordinator, to the hiring of Antonio Toro as Facilities Manager and Charis Domador as Connections Coordinator. We have been exit-interviewing and onboarding pretty consistently, but the skill set of our current staff is the right mix of what we need now and for the foreseeable future.

Antonio has made epic progress in addressing past-due maintenance projects, including those from the two preschools that rent our childcare buildings. Lights, doors, and floors have all been repaired, as well as safety upgrades made all over campus. Major campus upgrades include replacing the gas main, installing an efficient sanctuary furnace, and installation of the Lundin Memorial Access Ramp, facilitating wheelchair access from the sanctuary floor to the chancel. Jane Lundin generously donated this ramp in memory of her late husband and was intricately involved in its design and aesthetics. Dave Roberts has been integral in the completion and funding of the remodel of the cottage at 816 Craft Avenue. Michael DeWitt has spearheaded multiple Audio/Visual system improvements.

We improved our rental capacity by changing our calendaring system with the dedicated help of Jim Gasperini. We renegotiated annual contracts and analyzed member and community use of our space. We improved support of fundraising efforts, increasing marketing and social media presence and logistics coordination, especially for music events.

Hard questions were asked. Volunteers analyzed the sustainability of the Lawson Road campus. Although the property is worth a lot, it would not sell for enough to move us to a suitable location and add to the endowment. Our best bet at this point is to stay and make the most of what we have. We also delved deep into options for the Freestone Retreat, but those conversations have been hampered by recent events. We hope to return to this conversation soon.

A new opportunity

This coming year will also see a major change in our ministry. Although we understand and support our Senior Co-Ministers needing to move closer to family, we will miss them greatly and all that they brought to our community. Our future minister(s) will help us guide our church in unprecedented times, providing fresh insight into how to best position ourselves to be the resource our community needs and finding new ways to reach out, reach in, and build up UUCB.

Finances and budget (see Proposed Operations Budget v. 3 below)

According to our bylaws, we have to approve a budget before the next fiscal year. This feels a lot like trying to fish in the dark with no pole, and we’re not even sure where the lake is. The original budget had a reasonable number of assumptions and projections,

which have gone by the wayside in the last two months.

What we know: The preschools that lease our space are committed to the leases they signed, and one of them is planning to expand as soon as they can reopen. This will do a lot to alleviate cash flow concerns, as Governor Newsom is working on ways to keep all schools open, even if the virus resurfaces. The cottage is almost finished and with limited housing in our area, we should be able to lease it at market rates. Our congregation will continue to help as much as they are able.

What we don't know: We are not sure how long or how serious the economic downturn will be. This could affect people's ability to pay pledges and donate to special causes that we work with. We don't know when we will be allowed to gather in large groups again, affecting plate collections and rental revenue.

Our plans: We have included a budget with a 20% decrease in revenue versus our original budget. We have tried to decrease costs in every way possible, from turning off pilot lights to cutting our garbage service in half. (Thanks Abbot Foote!) Some staff were already planning on reducing hours, and not filling other positions until revenue improves will give us some flexibility. We will try and support current staff as much as possible while balancing financial concerns.

We are also turning over every leaf for new revenue, including listing as a film location with local and state film commissions and speakers bureaus. We have even submitted ideas to the Governor to consider churches as a resource for socially distant remote work locations. And as soon as we can meet in person, whether it be for 10 people or 500, we will welcome our community with open arms!

Living through historical times

Saying that these are not normal times is an understatement. Although many of the things we do will be different going forward, not all of it is bad. We will drastically reduce our carbon footprint by allowing staff to work from home more often even when restrictions are lifted. We will continue to increase transparency by offering remote attendance of in-person meetings. We will livestream services and events -- increasing market value for rentals, expanding our fundraising options, and extending the message of Unitarian Universalism to a broader community. Change is hard, but we will continue to make the most of the opportunities available to us. Our beloved community will conquer the obstacles that come before us, as we continue to inspire lives of integrity, joy, and service united together.