

Interim Minister's Report June 2021

We have been through quite a year, and nothing like the one that we may have predicted a couple of years ago. Ministerial transitions, virtual worship services and programming, new committees and old committees, and lots and lots of great work done by so many of our leaders and volunteers. And then there's everything that's happened outside our walls too, both near and far: a challenging fire season, the 2020 election, the highlighting of racial injustice throughout our country and the rising up against it, and a full year of a pandemic that we initially thought would only be a couple of weeks. As a country and a world, we've been through a challenging year. As a church, we've been through a challenging year. And as individuals we've been through a challenging year.

This past year has been hard on all of us, in some similar ways as well as in many different ways. In many ways, we are going to be carrying the after-effects of the pandemic/etc year for a good while, healing from them, holding and helping each other, and re-finding ourselves in many ways.

We are now about to move forward into a new church year and into a time that feels both new and different in many ways while hopefully some version of "back to normal" in others. After nearly a year of interim time, albeit a different kind of interim time that we might have usually had since we've been meeting online and virtually all year, it's a good time to pause and reflect. I'd like to invite us into reflection on the five (plus one) focus areas for congregational interim times. There are the five "traditional" focus areas, plus the addition of a focus on anti-racism work which is key work for us as Unitarian Universalists at this time. I've included some discussion questions with each as well as one important one at the end.

Five Areas of Focus for Interim Times (plus one):

Heritage: *reviewing how the congregation has been shaped and formed*

One way of thinking about this is our core stories, which I preached about on May 23rd. These may be stories that we are proud of, or they may be ones that we'd rather talk less about or avoid altogether. Regardless, these are the stories and the events that have made the congregation who it is. It is instructive to consider them and to consider how they may be impacting the congregation currently. Among the stories told to me as core stories are (moving to the hill, joining the case about the Levering Act that ultimately went to the U.S. Supreme Court, fighting against McCarthyism and for LGBTQ rights, recovering and healing from ministerial misconduct, to name just a few). We are in the midst of the formation of core stories right at the moment too: that of resilience during the Covid pandemic and however we might come to know our growing energy and focus around racial justice issues.

- What core stories do Board members want to lift up right now, and what are the values that we hear in those stories?
- What might we learn from some of the challenging stories in our history and heritage?

Leadership: *reviewing the membership needs and its ways of organizing and developing new and effective leadership*

Interim time is often a fantastic time to get to pause, reassess if anything might be missing, and to try some things out. The pandemic induced year and a half of virtual church has instigated that even more so. So many of "the way we always do things" have gotten paused. One of the themes for next year the Board adopted is "Engaging with change: Building resistance and hardiness." Now is the time to really evaluate and make conscious decisions about how we are restarting. Among ideas floating around among other churches, the UUA, and UUCB are: care and caution around protocols and reopening plans,

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some truly outside-the-box thinking about engaging with our younger folks and across all ages (think recess!), and thinking in a transformational way about conflict rather than avoiding the topic entirely.

- As we begin to come back to in-person (and multi-platform) gatherings, what is something that we are hoping or planning to be done differently?
- What experiments from the past year do we think we will carry forward?
- What is still missing, in terms of either membership needs or leadership development?

Mission: *defining and redefining sense of purpose and direction*

This is the identity area, our mission, our sense of who we are and how that influences our work in the world. It's both the big picture and overall sense, but also how each of our individual members and groups might describe our identity and mission. And, the big question, how similar are those descriptions, from person to person and group to group.

- How would you describe or state the mission of UUCB? What is our purpose?
- How varied do you think this is across UUCB's membership and many groups?
- The Board included revisiting the mission statement in its areas of emphasis for 2021-22. What initial thoughts do you have about potential changes?

Connections: *discovering all the relationships a faith community builds outside of itself*

The connections area includes local and state partnerships with non-UU groups, UU clusters, as well as connections to our region and denomination. The interim time is a good time to take a look at these connections and see if there is anything that is missing or that could use some extra energy or focus in order to better develop. The Board adopted as one of its 2021-22 themes: "Partnering: Ongoing and vigorous connections with the larger community." Examples of connections include the Bay Area UUs (a "cluster" of UU congregations in our area that UUCB was one of the initial instigators of), GRIP (Greater Richmond Interfaith Program), our support of and work with Youth Spirit Artwork and their tiny house village in Oakland, and our relationships with the Good Earth School and EarthTreks (two of the renters on our campuses). We've got a number of good partnerships and connections, but I believe this is a huge potential growth area for virtually all congregations. I love that our board has included "vigorous" in this theme for the coming year and I hope that we can move to embrace that hope.

- What's a partnership or connection that's you've found particularly exciting or inspirational in the past year?
- What's something you're wondering about regarding our UUA region or about the denomination?
- Is there anything missing in terms of connections or partnerships that needs additional focus in the next year?

Future: *supporting proactive decision-making for the future*

This area thinks about the strategic thinking, visioning, short-term and long-term proactive planning. It's interesting that this area has been both challenged and stimulated by the pandemic and other challenges of the past year. How well would you say UUCB is doing with regards to visioning and planning for the future?

- Are there any perspectives or ideas that are missing from our thought processes and planning?
- One of the Board-adopted 2021-22 theme is "Managing: Stewardship & Sustainability." When we talk about sustainability, what's the one thing that you think of first?

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Anti-Racism: *discerning and implementing actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in individuals and the congregation, for example those recommended in the Widening the Circle of Concern report*

This past year has held some amazing anti-racism work and projects here at UUCB as well as a board task force taking a huge deep dive into the UUA's Widening the Circle of Concern report.

Implementing/incorporating recommendations from the Widening the Circle of Concern Task Force is one of the Board-adopted areas of emphasis for next year. We'll be talking about the recommendations from that report this fall so there will be plenty more details and discussion on that when that time comes. In the meantime, a significant amount of our membership have been involved in one or more of our anti-racism efforts in the past year.

- What's something that you've felt has been successful in the past year in terms of our anti-racism and racial justice work?
- What's somewhere that we've fallen short in this work in the past year?
- Is there anything that you're particularly looking forward to in the next year for our congregational anti-racism efforts?

Finally, thinking about all six of these interim focus areas, ***if you were to choose two of them that could benefit most from additional focus in the next year, which two would they be?*** It's important to consider this question both in terms of where the congregation is right now as well as the fact that we'll be gearing up for a ministerial search starting next spring/summer.