

State of the Congregation Report
Board of Trustees President Beth Pollard
May 23, 2021

At this time last year, we were in the depths of uncertainty. Our ministers had just announced they were leaving to move close to family. A powerful and pervasive pandemic had seized control over our lives, with no known release date. We feared for the physical and mental health of ourselves, our families, and our friends and other church members in the face of COVID and the deplorable murders of black and brown men and women at the hands of police. We fretted about the financial health and vitality of our church, adopting a slimmed-down budget.

But we are UUCB. We are Unitarian Universalists. With the strong leadership of former Board Presidents Kerry Simpson and Kathryn Jay, we lit pathways for ourselves and one another. We found an amazingly talented interim minister – Rev. Michelle - to guide us through spiritual and logistical thickets. You, UUCB congregants, volunteered, innovated, cared, contributed, and basically confronted the COVID-19 molecules with: “You are not going to crush our spirit, nor our community, nor our commitment to love, justice, compassion, and one another. We are UUCB.”

With our resilience, here are just some examples of what we accomplished last year:

- We moved all our worship, events, activities, meetings and communications on-line. This deserves underscoring: With help from members with tech talent, we pivoted on a dime to have all our worship, events, activities, meetings and communications on-line.
- We personally connected with every household, providing grocery assistance and pastoral care where needed
- We dove into the UUA’s Widening the Circle of Concern anti-racism and anti-oppression work, created scholarships, and are at the precipice of hearing our own task force’s recommendations for our congregation.
- We embraced an expanded number of members of UUCB, other congregations, and the general community chalice circles to process challenges and share experiences in supportive settings
- At a time when other congregations are struggling to survive, we exceeded our pledge goal, obtained not one but two Payroll Protection Program loan grants, and strengthened our financial position and accounting.
- Working with Youth Spirit Artworks, we helped build 22 tiny homes for youth in need of housing.
- We signed thousands of voter encouragement cards, launched Honoring Indigenous Peoples’ initiatives, and marched, spoke and pushed for racial justice after the horrific police officer murder of George Floyd and so many other black and brown men and women
- Blending vocalists and instrumentalists from near and far, our worship services were filled with the sound of music to buoy our spirits and comfort us through loss.
- Improved the safety and beauty of our campus

- The Board welcomed new Trustees Ariel Smith-Iyer, Bill Brown, and Randall Hudson and threw itself into strengthening teamwork – for which I am very grateful.
- The Board updated its governance manual, notably reflecting the creation of the Program Council and the Executive Director position, established a Board Finance Committee, and appointed Jessica Rider as Interim Treasurer

This year was not without its uphill trails and trials. COVID-19 took the lives of a few congregants as well as family members and friends. We were unable to grieve in person those losses and the passing of other loved ones. We couldn't even see one another in person - to touch and laugh together, to see each other's three-dimensional smile. We've had to endure a year without **hugs** – in the Atrium and elsewhere.

We worried about members living alone and helped them connect on Zoom. The particular impacts of the pandemic on children, youth, and parents – overloaded with screentime and restricted in activity – has weighed heavily on us. We have deeply missed the exuberance of the young ones in our community, and the hope they bring us for our future.

For next year we look forward to making up for lost time. With counsel from our Reopening Task Force, we will improve our air circulation and follow protocols for safe gathering when the time is right. We will grieve and celebrate in person. We will initiate innovative youth and children programming to engage the next generation in our faith and learn from their young insights. And look forward to the time when we can sing our hearts out in unison, rally closely together for justice, and hold one another tight in comfort.

We do have some work to do. We need to create and adapt to change - reflecting new sensibilities from COVID times, evolution of thought about attracting and retaining church members and participants, and tech innovations and appetites for multi-platform and dynamic communication.

As UUCB we need to coalesce around who we are as a church community in search of our next minister. With tremendous gratitude to Rev. Michelle, we are blessed with her agreeing to a third year of interim ministry, enabling us to defer the launch of our ministerial search until late next spring. During this next year I expect we will meet in various formats on topics related to who we are, our mission, the UUA's proposed 8th Principle, widening our circle of concern, how we connect with other communities and welcome those not yet among us, and more.

When I first drafted today's comments, I started listing names of groups and individuals who were behind the accomplishments of the past year. It wasn't too long before an anxious voice in my head shouted "but what if you overlook somebody?" With the list as long as it would need to be to cover the dozens and dozens of volunteers and activity

areas of the church, not only would I miss deserved recognitions, we would be here for far too long.

Then it hit me. These are the accomplishments of all of us. We are a community of people who covenant with one another. Our UUCB covenant we read earlier starts with "We covenant to build a religious community..." and later says "in celebration of the common purpose that unites us, we will do our best to abide by this covenant."

What one person or group achieves, we all achieve. One person or group's challenge is all of ours. The operational improvements we make support the program, outreach, and social change we can achieve. We are an interconnected web. We have a ripple effect on one another. We are in this together.