



Acting Senior Minister's Report to the Congregation May 2017

Our Senior Minister, Rev Dr. Roger Jones (yes, he completed his dissertation!) will return next month and I am proud to say that the congregation is thriving. I hope you agree. We have many newcomers, new members, new programs and lots of positive energy. Attendance at worship services is robust. We are truly living our mission to deepen our lives and be a force for healing in the world. Thanks to all who supported me during this sabbatical time as I served as your Acting Senior Minister. Let me summarize some of our accomplishments this past year.

Pastoral Care

We are fortunate to have the Rev Martha Hodges leading our pastoral visitors program. We started this program in anticipation of Roger's sabbatical and it has been a great addition to the pastoral care provided by the ministers. She and her team have reached out to members who can't make it to church or need ongoing pastoral support. Scott and I have focused on the most critical needs, including members in crisis, dying members and memorial services. However, my door is always open to folks who need a good listening presence and I have a regular stream of visitors during my office hours.

Membership

Scott has done an excellent job this year as the lead minister for our membership committee. Our path to membership program is going strong with increased participation in our Newcomer Orientation and Exploring UU classes. We also added a Meet and Greet session in the library after each service. This event gives our newcomers a chance to speak directly to greeters and members of the Board and Program Council. The membership/greeter committee has done a wonderful job being welcoming to all those who enter our doors. We welcomed 34 new members this past year.

Social Justice

Our Social Justice Theme this year was Confronting Economic Inequality and we had a robust schedule of activities with sermons, movies and book discussions each month. I want to thank Scott, Eric Ross, and Rev Martha for helping to lead those activities. During the fall and winter, more than 50 congregants participated in a Habitat for Humanity Project helping to build homes for immigrant families. At Christmas time the choir helped us raise funds to stuff more than 75 stockings for the homeless.

Our congregation added new programs this year including Interfaith Earth Justice and Immigrant Justice. Continue to check the blue sheet and website for exciting upcoming activities from these groups.

Racial Justice is another one of our new programs this year. As a result of their planning and communication with congregation, we voted to display a “Black Lives Matter Here” banner at the front of the church. We also offered the anti-racism program Beloved Conversations again this year in cooperation with the UU congregation in Davis. Racial justice is becoming an important issue with UUs around the country and I am committed to continuing the work to raise our awareness and engagement.

Our Refugee support program is going strong as is Family Promise, UU Justice in the Middle East, Earth Justice, and our support for Loaves and Fishes, St Johns, the Sacramento Food Bank, and the American River Parkway Clean-up. It is amazing all the ways we are living out our mission to be a force for healing in the world.

I’m proud to announce that our monthly share-the plate program is on track to donate almost \$35,000 this year to our community partners. This is a significant increase over last year.

UUSS has affiliated with the local Interfaith Group, Area Congregations Together, which has more than 60 member organizations. We are just beginning to connect with the great work of this organization. Roger and I are hosting a clergy breakfast next month to help build connections and find ways that our congregation can more fully engage with the Sacramento Interfaith Community. Now more than ever, we need to reach out to organizations that share our values.

Small Group Ministries and Programs

This was the third year for our Spiritual Deepening Circles program; this year we had 6 circles with a total of almost 70 people participating. This program has been a great way for members and newcomers to grow spiritually, share deeply, build connections and develop listening skills. The circles end this month and will start up again in the fall with new groups. The GenY group has their own circle which meets monthly using the same curriculum as the other circles.

For the past several months we have held bi-weekly Tuesday evening worship services, called the Resilience Gathering. These services are designed for those who need a spiritual boost in the middle of the week or some quiet time to reflect and restore. Unfortunately, attendance has been low, so by fall we will determine if that program will continue.

There have been many new programs started by members this past year. If you were at church this morning you heard a list of all our church programs. In a church our size small groups ministries and fellowship programs are a critical part of building connections and community. Also for a church our size, we have an impressive selection of groups, classes and programs. Thanks to the many who lead and participate in these valuable programs.

Stewardship and Fundraising

Thanks to the generosity of the congregation and the skill of our leadership, we have been successful in fund raising this year. Our stewardship campaign resulted in a seven percent increase over the previous year's total. Some of the increase is due to new pledgers and some is because twenty-five percent of the pledges were increases over the prior year. Thanks to all who pledged to our operating fund. Three quarters of our budget comes from pledges and this increase will allow us to increase our support for our programs and staff. The Spring auction was a great success and raised more \$30,000 for our operating fund.

We owe a debt of thanks to two Ginny Johnson and Kathy Bernard who led the stewardship and auction teams the past two year. Both these positions leadership will be open for next year so I encourage you to consider whether you are the right person for either of these jobs.

Administration and Property Management

We had a major staff transition this year with the resignation of our Facilities and Communications Coordinator Stanton Vedell this April. I am delighted that we found an able replacement in Krystal Gollaher, previously one of our part-time childcare workers. Krystal has hit the ground running and has made the job her own in a short time.

We completed various projects for our new building this year. These include new artwork in the sanctuary, the completion of the banner project, historical photos in the library, and the installation and use of our projector. On the less positive side, with the winter rains we learned that the basement sump pump was not working. We are still cleaning out from the flood.

With funds from our Aloha dinner last year along with the Capital Improvement budget we painted the RE building and had blinds installed in the classrooms. The homeless families we host through Family Promise will now be able to sleep without bright lights shining into their rooms. Our Administrative and Property Management Team is working on plans to increase the number of parking spaces, and a design for a proposed patio cover. Stay tuned for updates on these improvements.

Religious Education

With the addition of new families, enrollment in our Religious Education program is up this year. Our Religious Education Coordinator, Miranda Massa, is doing a great job coordinating our program. We offered the sexuality education program Our Whole Lives to 4-6 graders this past fall and will offer the 7-9 grade edition this coming year. Spirit Play (grades K-5), Junior High Youth Group (JHYG) and Senior High Youth Group (SHYG) are going well thanks to our dedicated volunteers. We were fortunate to have Starr King Student Anthony Johnson serve as head teacher for the Neighboring Faiths curriculum. Part of that program featured JHYG students visiting several nearby churches of different religions. JHYG also designed and constructed their own UU board game. Next Sunday is the final day for this year's Religious Education program. Please join us at the service on June 4 when we thank the teachers and volunteers who make it all possible.

The Kids' Freedom Club was a consistent and fun presence and gave our children an opportunity to spearhead their own social justice activities. We enjoyed delicious chocolate and pancakes as they raised funds, and they provided us opportunities to learn about modern slavery in our world and contribute to the cause.

Worship/Music

Many UU and liberal congregations experienced what is called the "Trump Bump" this past year after the election. Attendance at our worship services increased significantly as well, and continues to be about 10 percent higher than the prior year in the months since the election. While the election may have brought people to the congregation, it is our welcome, and the quality of our worship services, programs and people that keep them coming.

We have had a full and varied program of worship services this past year. In my preaching, I paid attention to the needs of the congregation related to the election and subsequent challenges in our country. I hope that you have found our worship services to be meaningful.

I want to thank all those who helped fill out the preaching schedule during Rogers absence, including Rev Martha, Allison Claire and Rich Howard. The congregation also got to participate in the learning process for our ministerial intern, D. Scott Cooper who preached monthly and contributed to our worship every Sunday. I would not have made it through this year without him - at least not made it through with my sanity intact.

I am particularly proud of the efforts we made to make the all-ages services more welcoming and engaging for children. Our children and youth contribute in many ways during these services including helping to collect the offering, and participating in Joys and Sorrows. We have also added an activity for kids who have trouble sitting still. I have heard from parents that their children now look forward to the all-ages services! Thanks to Miranda for her great ideas and organizing skill.

I also want to express my appreciation for our Music Director Keith Atwater. He is open and agreeable to all my cockamamie ideas, and has really brought out the best in our choir. We are blessed to have his kind, creative and committed energy in our congregation.

Thanks for your commitment and participation this church year. We would not be the same without you. I look forward to Roger's return the year ahead.

Rev Lucy Bunch
Acting Senior Minister
UU Society of Sacramento