

January Minister's Report to the Board

Shared Ministry Reports

Healthy Congregation Team: This month, I met with the HCT to discuss a couple of situations that I will report on verbally regarding individual concerns. We also discussed their involvement in the information Ministerial Advisory and Support Team (MAST) and partnering with me on the Chalice Fillers program, which will launch sometime in February (see **HCT Supplement** for more info on both items.)

RE: This weekend, we had 5 youth and one advisor attend the Houston area rally, our first rally-goers in several years! Many thanks to Gay Lynn for handling all the permissions and paperwork, and Karl for venturing into rallyland for the first time. Gay Lynn, the REC and I are discussing ways to involve the children and youth more in multigenerational worship as active participants (readers, greeters, lay leader, special music, class-wide projects, etc.) Gay Lynn is also in the process of calling families who have been absent for a few Sundays and checking in with them, in the hopes of increasing participation. Gay Lynn and the REC are working very intentionally around how they share responsibilities within the program as well.

Worship: December was fantastic! I have gotten a lot of positive feedback about our December services and burning bowl, and I am looking forward to this spring. I'm planning several services this January and February drawing wisdom from Black UU theology, as one way of "centering the margins" and learning from UUs whose cultural and racial location has meant that they have wrestled with Unitarian Universalism in some new and different ways. What can we learn from these perspectives? A more inclusive and diverse expression of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, I hope. At the end of February, I will put together a six-month analysis of worship attendance since we have moved to two services, and share with the board at the next meeting. I am considering doing a worship survey, but I do not want to conflict with the rollout of Time and Talent...

Membership: I was not able to help teach Pathways this month, but I recorded a video welcoming participants to the class. (I'm wondering if this sort of thing might be fun to do for the website or public Facebook page.) This Thursday, I sent off the second batch of around 300 postcards. I have noticed an uptick in new visitors recently but have no way to know if this is associated with the postcard outreach project or not. I'm also working with Membership to reach out pastorally to a few members we haven't seen in a while.

Stewardship: This month Jamie and I conducted a review of current pledge status with Jamie and identified folks who were significantly behind in their pledge, and weeding out those whose circumstances she or I was already aware of. On consultation with the Stewardship Team, I will be writing a personal email to the identified pledging units to check in generally and ask if they are aware of the pledge discrepancy. Some might need to adjust their pledge, while others may not even realize they aren't paying it due to a technical problem (wrong card set up for autopay, etc.). There are about 25 pledging units that I will need to contact.

SEE Justice: I'm excited to partner with Greg on bringing the Power of Hope art installation to Northwoods in April and tying some other programs and events in with this theme over the month. (See **Power of Hope Supplement** for more information.) I am also signed up to attend an e-course along with several members of the Sanctuary Team titled "Changing Systems, Changing Ourselves" to learn more about how we can support those enmeshed in our broken immigration system. (If you want to hear more or sign up for this with me, I have flyers with me today.) I also led the first class of a Reproductive Justice curriculum being offered this Spring.

For Board Consideration: Open Church Policy, Finance Committee, Check Request Policy, Pastoral Care

Open Church Policy: When is the church considered open to the public? Over the past few months this has come up regarding our friend Caleb, who is currently without housing and stays next door at the Christian Science Church. We have provided some support to Caleb as well, which includes periodic showers and the ability to rest indoors from time to time. However, there are no churchwide guideline for when the church is open for public use, so it's been hard to establish when he can come in and when he can't.

As a result, there have been times when he's asked to come in in the evenings during a time when congregants are here but staff is not, leading to confusion on the congregant's part as to whether he should be allowed in or not. This has also happened with renters. Also, when the staff are here alone, it's not a good idea to have someone in the building who is not a known part of our community. All of this puts unfair pressure on both Gay Lynn and Jamie and well as putting members and renters in an uncomfortable situation. At least once that I know of, Caleb has been in the building alone when a staff person arrived. I've talked with Caleb and explained that he can't be alone in the building, but if a group lets him in and doesn't check to see if he's left when they lock up, it's easier to see how this can happen.

Current solution: This Friday, I sat down with Caleb and explained that, now that this is a longer-term situation, we needed to put some boundaries around when he can be in the building for the reasons above and also to protect him from liability. I explained that unless I and another person are in the building, we won't be able to let him in and instructed him to check the parking lot to see if my car and at least one other car are here before he comes over, because if I'm not in the building with at least one more person, we won't be able to let him in. *I would appreciate if Board members would take this information and share it with the groups they work with who meet regularly at the church so that we will be consistent. "I'm sorry, we can't let you in right now." If the Board is amenable to making this policy, folks would also be able to say, "This is the church's policy."*

As time goes by, I see a need to make some concrete decisions about when our church is a public space and when it is not. Perhaps this is part of our building and safety policy?

Finance Committee: *Has the Finance Committee met this year?* We were doing a great job establishing a group when there was no treasurer, but I haven't heard anything from this group since then. Should this group be meeting regularly?

Check Request Policy: In the interest of formalizing standard procedures, Jamie and I would like to *request that the Board consider formalizing a check request policy* that includes the correct procedure for requesting a check as well as how to pick it up and when it will be ready. I can ask Jamie to provide the language for this policy for *consideration at the next board meeting.*

Pastoral Care: I have noticed that I a number of the people whom I have provided support or pastoral care for are not members of Northwoods but are nonmember friends or, more often, former members in a time of crisis. This is an investment of time that means that I have less time to invest in other things, including ongoing pastoral care for members who are ill or less able to come to church. *I'd love to hear your thoughts on this;* I'm not sure there's a "solution," but it is something I wanted to bring to your attention.

Ongoing and Upcoming: Things I'm Thinking About/Working On/ Planning

MAST: I am working on recruiting additional members to the MAST and determining which HCT members would like to serve. I envision this group's primary tasks for the remainder of the church year to be completing evaluations for my preliminary fellowship renewal and investigating how we might go about "assessing the health and vitality of our shared ministries," which seems like an appropriate task to undertake in 2020-2021, the third year of Northwoods' developmental ministry. *I envision that the MAST, the HCT and the Board will work together on this in the coming year.*

Altar Guild: Once again, after being by default in charge of Hanging (and un-hanging) the greens, I find myself returning to the idea of an "altar guild," people who take on the responsibility of decorating the sanctuary. (Perhaps we could even do other decorations throughout the year.) These folks could also help me with setup and altar-building for special services throughout the year.

Sunday Hospitality: The same people (all of whom give much of themselves to the church in other ways) are almost always setting up (and cleaning up!) our Sunday hospitality (coffee, snacks, kitchen). There has got to be a better way. I am thinking of creating a signup sheet and asking folks to sign up to host or clean up Sunday Hospitality, while asking the "regulars" to refrain from signing up for a week or two. If no one signs up, there will be no coffee. I predict this will happen once. Going forward, if there is no one signed up for the following week, there is an announcement from the pulpit that no one has signed up to host/clean up after Sunday Hospitality the next Sunday and inviting anyone interested to do so. We'll also have to assess how well our instructions are made clear and available and possibly provide some training.

Bulletin Boards: The staff and I continue to assess our use of bulletin board space and its effectiveness as a communication tool as well as a marketing tool for visitors (on Sunday and otherwise). The RE program will be reclaiming space on the large board across from the restrooms, and I am looking at sprucing up the Adult RE portion of that board as well. Next up: The boards in the hall outside the nursery and family room!

Professional Development

- Completed Prepare/Enrich relationship counseling certification (Jan. 14)
- Engaged in two online ministries for spiritual direction and renewal run by two entrepreneurial UU ministers as part of my own spiritual practice (ongoing)
- Changing Systems, Changing Ourselves e-course with Sanctuary Team Members (Jan-May)
- Taking two-day workshop from The Center for Healing Racism in Houston (Feb. 22,29);
- Attending Southwest UU Minister's Association annual retreat (March 30-April 2)
- Attending General Assembly (June 24-28)
- Future Plans: exploring working with a systems coach to identify areas for congregational growth and resistance in the second half of our developmental ministry

Scheduled Personal and Study Leave:

- Feb. 22 and 29: Study Leave (Center for Healing Racism workshop)
- March 4-5: Personal Days (Houston Rodeo)
- March 30-April 2: SWUUMA Minister's Retreat (Camp Allen)
- May 8-12: Personal Travel- Operation Surprising Mom for Mother's Day
- June 23-29: General Assembly (Providence, RI)
- June 30-July 5: Personal Travel (Newport, RI)

HCT Supplement

Here is a brief overview of the two items I brought for discussion this month:

Chalice Fillers: I was thinking about how we might get folks accustomed to giving feedback, not just about concerns but in a more general sense, and I had a brainstorm based on an activity from Harry Potter camp. At camp, they had "chalice points" where anyone could write something positive about their day at camp or praise someone for doing something well or going out of their way to be kind/helpful. They were written on flame-shaped papers, which were then used as a border on the camp bulletin board. Each day of camp, these were shared in the daily newsletter that went home with the kids. My idea was that we could do something similar for the whole congregation, inviting folks to "fill the chalice" by writing on a flame-shaped paper something positive about their experience at Northwoods or praise someone for doing something well or going out of their way to be kind/helpful. Then we would add them to a "Chalice Fillers" bulletin board—we could even publish them in the Beacon Bits.

I am thinking of this as a joint effort, and a way of bringing more visibility to the HCT, albeit one that requires very little of each of you. I'd like to use the bulletin board outside the nursery (where the HCT pictures used to live) and include the names, photos and contact info for the HCT along the bottom of the bulletin board, so that when folks stopped to read what's on the flames they might also take in a reminder about the HCT. I'll even make the bulletin board. If you are amenable to having your name attached to this, I'd like to roll it out in a worship service in February.

Ministerial Advisory and Support Team: This idea asks a bit more of you. In my contract, there is a provision for me to have a "Team Sarah" to support my ministry. (This team would also participate in my preliminary fellowship renewal evaluations.) I have not constituted this team, as I wasn't sure what their purpose might be, but now I have one!

At the board meeting you all attended when we discussed the HCT and its history and creation, I asked who held the "assessing and strengthening the quality of our shared ministries" responsibility once held by the Committee on Ministry. This was not part of the HCT's purview or mission when it was created, but it wasn't clear who was doing that. The board has enough to handle in their role to take on this project, but it's important to the ongoing health of Northwoods that we assess and strengthen our shared ministry—as well as identify needs and gaps where our ministries are not fulfilling their purpose or need more support.

Enter the Ministerial Advisory and Support Team, or MAST. The document attached here is based on the very successful model one of my colleagues shared with me, and I would like to implement it here. Since this group's purpose has a lot of overlap with the HCT's "keeping an eye on the temperature of the congregation" function, I would like to invite the HCT members to be a part of the MAST in addition to others invited by me—that way, the group is composed of people elected by the congregation as well as those appointed by the minister, for the sake of balance and scope. This is still a work in progress, but I would like to invite the group to begin meeting later this month, as I need their help with completing an evaluation for my upcoming preliminary fellowship renewal before March. I would love to hear your thoughts on the group as well as whether you'd be willing to participate in the MAST.

Power of Hope Supplement

Last week, I met with Greg McDonnell and others to discuss a project he is bringing to Northwoods combining the arts and immigration justice, called The Power of Hope. The centerpiece is an art exhibit containing art made by mothers and children in detention centers while seeking asylum.

Greg and I are fleshing out other ways to engage on the topic of immigration over the month of April, but the kickoff event will take place April 4, with a reception and talk from one of the project organizers about the stories behind the project. We'll be displaying the art in the sanctuary, and I have invited the project organizers to take the pulpit Sunday April 5, and they have agreed with enthusiasm.

The art is displayed on several large boards, and I'd like to keep it in the sanctuary for at least some of the month, displaying it elsewhere as needed (I suspect we will find alternate locations in the building during things like Millbend, Rusty's musical, and other Sanctuary events during the month.) I've attached a template flier and some pictures of the exhibit so you have some idea what we'll be working with. You can also visit the curator's blog at <https://refugeeartblog.com/>

I'd love your ideas for other ways to tie in to immigration through the month of April: I'm thinking of tying immigration justice in with our Easter/Flower Communion on April 12 and leading some discussions using a UUA immigration reform study guide, and the Avant Garden Gallery will solicit art for that month's gallery change-out on the theme of "the power of hope." Greg is inviting the book groups to consider reading books related to immigration and the stories of asylum seekers as well as organizing a supply drive to support a project in Brownsville working across the border, just to give some idea of the scope of the project.

There are details to be worked out, but I'm really excited about bringing this exhibit and its organizers to Northwoods. (No speaker's honorarium is required, although the Sanctuary project will be offering travel compensation and Saturday night hospitality.) Questions? Concerns? Logistical thoughts? I welcome your feedback.