

February Minister's Report to the Board

Shared Ministry Reports

Healthy Congregation Team: The HCT and I have communicated several times, and they invited me to participate in a facilitated conversation this month that I believe they are reporting on elsewhere. Larry and I have been talking about what kind of training and support the other members of the HCT will need to lead these conversations, as he is rotating off and has handled much of the facilitation role. I'm going to introduce the "Chalice Fillers" program this Sunday.

RE: Gay Lynn handles most of this with the help of our volunteers. However, she and I met to discuss some plans for next year to do a monthly intergenerational gathering for food and fellowship and learning, as one of the ways we might "go deeper" together in the coming year. (In fact, "going deeper" seems to be the watchword for next year throughout the early planning process.)

Worship: I am enjoying the study for my current sermon series, and working to set up a team to help plan and execute our ambition Beltane in the Park plan in May. I am also working with Gay Lynn and RE volunteers to involve the children and youth more directly in all ages worship through this spring. Following the last Sunday in February, I will be compiling a six-month review and data analysis and will share with the board on Slack when that is complete.

Membership: This month, my involvement in membership has been to reach out to folks we haven't seen in a while or who could use a visit. (In the absence of a robust plan for a pastoral care team and process, the Membership meeting is one place I usually get a few important pastoral care leads.)

Stewardship: I am in the process of contacting those who are far behind on their pledge, but at least four folks on my list have already caught themselves up. I will be giving a service March 1 on "stewardship and deep community" focusing on the "benefits of membership" from a spiritual and theological perspective.

SEE Justice: We have Sanctuary guests! I am sure there will be plenty about this said elsewhere, but it fills my heart how this team has come together to support Suzane and Samuel and their baby Tracy.

For Board Consideration: Share the Plate, Lay Ministry and Pastoral Care

Share the Plate: How is this program being implemented? It doesn't seem to be clear, and isn't happening. Let's brainstorm this.

Lay Ministry and Pastoral Care: We need more folks participating in this area of congregational life. I can't address all the contact folks want and need, which means that some folks are slipping through the cracks. And that I need help. I doubt we'll solve this tonight, but I think it's important to name my concern here as I and others work on addressing these needs.

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

MAST: I have invited a number of folks to join the MAST, and I'm still in conversation with most of them. As I said last month, 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.*

Beyond Sundays: I have found myself thinking a lot about how we build community here at Northwoods outside Sundays. As people's lives become more complex, the reality is that we as a church must think outside the (Sunday morning) box to meet their spiritual needs. That is the impetus behind both the conversations partners I introduced in February (if folks like it, maybe we'll continue that.) and sharing some resources for "taking it home" and gathering as a family or group of friends outside Sunday mornings. (Gay Lynn and I have some plans to make this a monthly offering, with things that appeal to families with kids as well as older folks and others.) This is also part of why we are looking at a monthly midweek gathering for next year as well. Would love to hear your thoughts on this.

Professional Development

- I have had my first session with a systems coach (Rev. Jake Morrill from the Oak Ridge church) to identify areas for congregational growth and resistance in the second half of our developmental ministry. I hope to offer some reflections to you from our sessions in the months to come.
- 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)
- 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

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
- May 26-29: Personal Leave
- 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.