

March Minister's Report to the Board

To Discuss:

- **Coronavirus Response Planning**- What are we doing now? (see attached Beacon Bits column) What might we need to think about going, particularly if there is a local outbreak?
- **Ethical Police Engagement Plan** (see attached)
- **Two Services Analysis** (sent as PDF)
- **Spiritual Development Plans** (see attached)

Shared Ministry Reports

Healthy Congregation Team: The “Chalice Fillers” bulletin board came about as a way of helping our folks get in the habit of offering not just constructive criticism but positive feedback, one of the things that the HCT has hoped folks will grow more accustomed to. It was a great success and is a lovely display of affection for this congregation and its members. If you haven't spent time reading the notes written on the flames, I encourage you to spend a few minutes doing that.

RE: As we look toward next year and the likelihood that we may continue to have RE only during one service (no decisions made yet, but recruiting new volunteers is an uphill job) Gay Lynn and I have been thinking about ways that we can better welcome families with kids in the sanctuary. One approach that several churches I know of are trying is a “pryground” (working title!) space in the sanctuary for quiet activity, one that allows a bit more wiggle room for our younger guests. This is still a work in progress, but I hope it will send a message of welcome and inclusion to members and visitors alike.

Worship: I observe that I am enjoying a number of collaborative worship experiences this spring: With Jerry and Welcoming for this Sunday's service; with the youth, who did some awesome work at their lock-in for their March 22 service; with guest preachers Rev. Chuck Freeman of TXUJIM and Rev. Dr. Helen Boursier, creator of the Power of Hope art exhibit we are hosting in April; and with the Beltane in the Park planning team. (We could use a few more members if you are interested!) Later in May, I'll be working with the Reproductive Justice Team and Coming of Age class as well.

It's fun for me; I love working collaboratively. Not only does this result in great worship with many voices, but I'm finding it also lightens my worship load (from a time-management perspective) and allows me more time to do other pieces of ministry. Better. That's fun too.

Looking ahead: Worship Arts will be addressing the question of summer worship this week at our meeting, specifically, whether we move to a single service in the summer or make other programming changes. Also, we are currently scheduled to host the FaithsTogether interfaith quilt during December, which felt appropriate considering our seasonal emphasis on religious pluralism and the many ways we celebrate the returning of the sun.

Membership and Stewardship: I haven't met with either since the last board meeting. But an anecdote: Last month, Membership sent cards instead of letters to congregants we haven't seen in a while, and everyone at the meeting wrote a note and signed them. One of those folks posted a sweet Facebook post about how it made them feel loved. Great example of how centering care and concern for each other is at the heart of what this group does for Northwoods.

SEE Justice: A few notes:

- The Sanctuary Team is *hard at work*. Team lead Greg O'Donnell sent me a report, which I've attached to the end of this report. I am thinking about how to support and care for these hard-working servant leaders, possibly formalizing that care with a monthly personal reflection group.
- The Power of Hope project is getting close, and I hope you are all planning on coming to the opening reception for that art project April 4.
- Share the Plate is back! Paul and Cyndie shared a document with me outlining their process for approving and communicating with charities. I believe Share the Plate will take place on fourth Sundays going forward. March recipient will be TXUUJM on March 29, the day Rev. Chuck is here.
- I led the third Reproductive Justice workshop session, and was touched by the conversation and depth of thought and care that the participants brought to the table. This class is going great!
- I'm also taking the "Changing Systems, Changing Ourselves" e-course with six congregants involved with the Sanctuary Team, and we are learning so much together. It is also a good place to reflect on what we are learning from our Sanctuary experience and how we can use what we are learning in the class here.

Lay Ministry and Pastoral Care: Cyndie and I are meeting next week, and we are in conversation around current needs. To address our need for more peer-to-peer pastoral care, I am looking at doing some training and recruitment in late Spring.

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

MAST: I have four committed members and a couple of folks who are still thinking about it. We are currently trying to schedule a meeting in the latter part of March.

HR, Supervision and Performance Management (Evaluations): I have been working with HR to implement some of the supervision and performance management methods I learned at the Susan Beaumont workshop I attended this fall. The first step of this is to revise staff job descriptions so that they can be used as a basis for evaluations. This hasn't happened yet, and so I cannot use the evaluation method I would like. Instead, we are using a collaborative job description review, which includes discerning essential functions and core competencies for their position, in lieu of a more traditional performance review. HR and I have met with Jamie and Gay Lynn and are making our revisions now. Those meetings gave all of us a lot of insight into what makes our staff members excellent. I hope we'll be ready to share those revised job descriptions with the Board in April. Also in April, I'll be working with both staff members to do some position-specific goal-setting for the coming church year. (If you are interested in knowing more about the performance management and supervision methods we are implementing, I'd be happy to give you more details; just let me know!)

Leadership Development: I wonder if it would be beneficial to offer a workshop to congregational leaders once or twice May-August to think about goal-setting for their ministry groups. I was also thinking about a one-shot program about identifying core values, which could be used to think about oneself or about the core values of their ministry team. See also: Spiritual Development Ideas.

Professional Development

- Continue to meet with Preliminary Fellowship mentor and Developmental Ministry mentor, and I am looking forward to my third session of four with systems coach Rev. Jake Morrill.
- Continue online ministries spiritual direction and renewal group
- 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)
- I'm planning to take some study leave to dive into some church history, including annual reports and some of Northwoods' old strategic plans and vision documents, located with the assistance of Jamie and Terry Leyenberger. I'm curious about how we saw ourselves in past years, as a tool to help us better envision our future.

Scheduled Personal and Study Leave:

- March 30-April 2: SWUUMA Minister's Retreat (Camp Allen)
- May 8-12: Personal or Study Leave
- May 26-29: Personal Leave
- June 23-29: General Assembly (Providence, RI)
- June 30-July 5: Personal Travel (Newport, RI)

Coronavirus Beacon Bits Column

This week it has been a challenge to keep up with what's happening in the world. Super Tuesday dominated the news, along with continuing coverage of the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and news of additional cases being reported in the United States. I have been monitoring these reports, and there are many conversations happening among religious leaders about how best to plan and prepare our congregations. At this time, there has been no local cases reported, but it is still a good idea for us to be prepared. Our community includes many folks who are particularly vulnerable to such a potential outbreak—those with compromised immune systems, young children and the elderly population, those who work with vulnerable populations or in the medical field, and others.

I encourage us to continue to stay informed by reputable sources, and I also affirm that as a community there are a few things we can do to minimize risk to us all, and especially those among us who are most at risk.

1. Wash your hands! More often, using soap and warm water, for a count of at least 20 seconds. It might seem minor, but good hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways to counter the spread of infectious diseases.
2. If you are sick, please stay home. We love you and we will miss you, but it is important that we avoid exposing large groups of folks to contagious diseases whenever possible. This goes for adults as well as kids, and I've instructed Northwoods' staff to do the same.
3. For further protection, we have placed hand sanitizer in several additional locations around the church building, including bathrooms, kitchen, sanctuary and vestibule.
4. If you are particularly concerned about your risk of getting sick, you might wish to wear a mask and/or gloves to church. While experts note that standard masks are not enough to protect against coronavirus, they are effective in other ways. If you would like to wear such protective gear to church, please do. You know best what your body needs, and I support you in taking care of yourself in whatever way feels best to you.
5. Another item at the top of most preventative lists is to avoid physical contact with others. Starting this Sunday, there will be stickers available as you enter the sanctuary for those who wish to avoid physical contact with others. They have cute little cactuses on them to remind everyone not to touch.
6. Look out for each other. If there is someone you have missed seeing at church for a couple of weeks, give them a call and let them know you are thinking about them. Some community members may stay home more often to reduce exposure to others; let's make sure they know they are missed and remain important parts of our community.

These are common, everyday measures to minimize the spread of infection diseases. Your church leadership will continue to monitor this situation and if necessary, make changes to how we operate to keep everyone safe in the event of a local outbreak. There are plenty of people on talk shows telling us to panic or telling us not to worry about it. The truth is that everyone has different levels of risk and must decide for themselves what protection they need. The potential for a coronavirus outbreak in the United States is real, and it is frightening to be so visibly reminded of how fragile life is. It is also a reminder that health care is not an individual concern but a collective concern. Our goal here at Northwoods is to be a welcoming place for all, including those who are most vulnerable, and I hope these measures reflect our inclusive spirit. If you have additional concerns or questions, please reach out to me directly.

Spiritual Development Plans

Spiritual Development Ideas: I've been thinking about a few ways to offer more spiritual development opportunities, as well as how to support lay pastoral caregivers and leadership development. Here are a few "two birds; one stone" spiritual development ideas:

These two four-session programs target Lay Ministry, Pastoral Care, Healthy Congregation team but would be open to all. Sessions are based on two of my absolute favorite ministry books; both are accessible to non-minister types-theology degree optional! I was thinking about alternating them annually.

- **Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High** Themes: navigating emotionally charged topics, understanding different perspectives and finding common purpose without compromising principles, self-differentiation during conflict
- **The Gift to Listen, The Courage to Hear** Themes: active listening, ministry of presence, "getting out of your own way" to attune to the needs of others

"Leadership and Learning," targeting Leadership Development but open to all; could invite specific individuals as well. Maybe offer a dinner cooked by current lay leaders before sessions? This would be a quarterly program.

- **Harvest the Power** (Tapestry of Faith program from UUA) This is the lay leader faith formation curriculum that changed my trajectory as a UU from one of being an active member to identifying as a leader. There are 12 sessions, taught quarterly on a three-year rotation. Themes: IDENTITY — Who are we? PURPOSE — What ends do we serve? PATH — In what way will we lead? Self, Community, Leadership, Vision

"Pathways 2.0," open to all but with targeted invitation for members here for <3 years. This would be a monthly offering on a three-year rotation, with 9 sessions each year. The sessions would come from:

- **What Moves Us: Unitarian Universalist Theology** (10 90-minute workshops) Explores life experiences of historic and contemporary Unitarian Universalist theologians, inviting consideration of theological questions that moved each of them.
- **Faith Like a River: Themes from Unitarian Universalist History** (16 2-hour workshops) Invites participants to place themselves into our history and consider its legacies and lessons for today. Each workshop presents history of one theme or topic; use singly or choose a short series.

All of these rely on already-created, no-cost curriculum with which I am familiar or books I learned from in seminary, which makes them much more time-effective for me to lead. I'd love to partner with a volunteer leader for any of these, as well.

Ethical Police Engagement Plans

In the most recent session of "Changing Systems, Changing Ourselves," we discussed how our congregations support as well as confront the carceral state and police system (Calling the cops for small theft/property damage, CRASE training, police providing security are examples of ways we support the carceral state implicitly.) The Northwoods group followed the class with a lively discussion: Knowing how irrevocably police interaction can change peoples' lives, when do we call the police? Are there other forms of justice that would be more restorative in some situations? How are we as a community of faith interact with law enforcement?

It's especially important for us to be thoughtful about this right now, with folks who are very vulnerable to the legal system living in our church. It's important to have a plan; if we have a commitment to not call police in minor situations, but do not have a plan in place for how to handle those situations, individuals will revert to the default—and call the police.

The group taking the class will be sharing with the Board some suggestions for ways to support community practices that seek to resolve or address situations without police involvement and criminalization.

Sanctuary Team Report to Board

Dear NUUC Board of Trustees,

On Feb. 8 a group of us visited Casa Juan Diego. Casa has been a refugee hospitality house since the early eighties. Learning of our willingness to house someone in need of sanctuary or in need of a place while seeking, asylum, we were asked to meet a family. We interviewed our present guests and they interviewed us. All agreed to give this a try, with neither party quite sure what it would be like.

We brought in an expert organizer to help make their living space more efficient. We are waiting for the permission to paint their bathroom. A member of our Support Team is ready to purchase a washer and dryer for the church. After settling our guests in Northwoods, we went to work on what we deemed were essential needs: medical, nourishment, legal.

Medical: We took Samuel and Suzane and registered them to receive care at Interfaith Community Clinic. Little Tracy is now under the care of Northwoods Pediatric Center receiving her regular well baby checks. She has Medicaid.

In addition, Suzane was taken to WIC (Women, Infants & Children) where she received a WIC card that can be used to purchase certain items each month. They also gave her a brand new electric breast pump, and a nursing bra. Suzane is still in need of her postpartum exam. It has been scheduled.

Food: Under the guidance of our Food Team meals have been prepared for several days during the week. Suzane and Samuel are making their way around the kitchen now cooking many of their meals. This team will continue to stay on top of this important area.

Legal: Samuel and Suzane's lawyer is Cynthia Milian of The Power's Law Group in Houston. We were in hopes that she was Pro-Bono but she indicates that she is Low-Bono. \$200/hr. for her work and \$100/hr. for legal assistance. Suzane's case appears to be much stronger than Samuels. Her application for asylum has been entered and she has taken the next step. We took her to the USCIS (United States Citizen and Immigration Service) in Houston Texas for step two in the process. Samuel had been detained in Pearsall, Texas where his case resides. Just this week papers will be filed for a change of venue from Pearsall to Houston. An application for Asylum has not yet been filed for Samuel. His lawyer would like to tie his case to Suzane's.

This is such a learning experience. I took Samuel to Amegy Bank to have an Affidavit notarized. They said that since he had no US issued ID they could not notarize it. So playing they devil's advocate, (Can a retired Minister do that?) I indicated to them that he did have some money to open up a bank account and would he be allowed to do that. Oh yes, we can do that. Do UUs believe you can go to hell for lying?

Our greatest needs at this point:

1. Additional people willing to transport the family to grocery stores, doctor appointments, etc.
2. Work for Samuel. We need individual families to pay him to do work around their house or farms. He says he can do most anything: paint, landscape work, heavy lifting, etc. Work would go a long way in improving his spirit and self-esteem.
3. We need to offer the family opportunities to get out of the church. An invitation for dinner at one's home, an outing at the park, A stroll around Market Square. (A member gracious bought them a new car seat and stroller.)
4. Complete renovation of the bathroom and install the new washer and dryer.
5. More money. As soon as I can get beyond The Power of Hope Project and the trip to Brownsville, I will look at ways to increase our Sanctuary Support Fund from outside sources.

Finally next Sunday, March 15th is Suzane's Birthday. We will have cake for her and hope to have the congregation celebrate with us between services. I would like to make this known to the congregation this week so that they can try to be a part of wishing her a Happy Birthday.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve this family,
Your Sanctuary Support Team