

## Minister's Report: May 2021

**Congregational Life:** I continue to work with Membership on welcoming new visitors as well as following up with those we are missing in services. This continues to be a great support to me in terms of pastoral care and lay ministry as well during the pandemic, as I often find out about folks who are struggling or having health issues here. Looking forward, I hope to be able to work with Mira Dessy (Pastoral Care lead) to recruit and train some additional pastoral caregivers to reach out to folks having a hard time to offer some support and conversation, as it remains a challenge to meet the needs of all on our own.

We also held our first open-to-all fellowship event since lockdown, a baby shower, which was well-attended. I did note that once there was food and drink involved, folks seemed a bit more reluctant to (re)mask, which has me thinking that when we go back to in person, as long as we are requiring masks, we might forego coffee and snacks for the time being.

**SEE Justice:** One of my goals is to attend the BLM public witness events sponsored by SEEJ, and I was finally able to make good and attend the last one on May 15. If you haven't been to one, please go. Seeing nearly 20 UUs on the Northshore Bridge definitely made an impact on me. (If you haven't seen Charlie Lindahl and David Shontz's [interview](#) with Egberto Willies, I recommend it!) Looking forward, our reinvigorated SURJ group is going to be looking at the Eighth Principle and how to bring the conversation about this important potential change to the UU principles to Northwoods, a project that will certainly expand beyond SEE Justice and into the congregation.

**Spiritual Life:** Worship Arts continues to be a strong team and a great support to me. They have lined up an impressive roster of speakers for this summer while I am out, and will no doubt continue to rock into the new church year. I am glad that the congregation and leadership are taking seriously the WA Team's need for additional volunteer assistance in the process of figuring out and executing the move to multiplatform worship services. I am a little protective of my "worship think-tank" and I'm relieved that there seem to be people stepping up to make this happen.

**Religious Education:** Gay Lynn is great, Hogwarts will be in person this year, summer programming is almost filled, we will need a few additional volunteers in the junior and senior high teaching teams. There will be an RE-centric discussion for families, youth and older children on June 6, which I will attend as well. Looking forward, I am discerning the best way to support the spiritual journeys of our adult members and provide UU faith formation opportunities. This has not been that year...

**Foundational Ministries:** I had a great meeting this month with our small-but-mighty Stewardship team, which is working on getting our year-round stewardship education and promotion up and running. Jaclyn Bell and Bob Mabry are both excellent team members, and Beth Marshall has done a fantastic job keeping shepherding this group in the absence of a chair, a situation that we will need to address going forward as a new foundational trustee is elected.

HR update: I have scheduled my next quarterly reviews with Gay Lynn and Jamie. In staff meeting today, we discussed the impracticality (and absurdity) of using our traditional annual evaluation process, so I am planning to write a narrative summary of a "year in review" for each of our employees, identifying strengths and lessons as well as goals from the past year and those that have been set for the coming year. I haven't actually run that by the HR team, but hopefully it will fly.

**DEVELOPMENTAL MINISTRY NOTES:** (This was included in my April report, but since reopening and other questions dominated, I wanted to reiterate) As we stare down the chute at the 2021-2022 church year, we will be entering the last two years of our developmental ministry together, and there are a few really important aspects of our ministry together that will come into focus. One of the primary functions of developmental ministry is to prepare a congregation to go into search for a settled minister; this fall, we will use the

information we gathered this spring to formulate revised developmental goals for Part C of our ministry together, which will by necessity include preparing for an executing a healthy, transparent, well-communicated and intentional search process, a process that will begin in the coming church year and continue through the remainder of the next couple of years. This time two years from now, you will ideally be celebrating having chosen to call your preferred candidate for settled ministry, having successfully gone through the search process. At least, that is a goal that I have for you, and one I hope you share.

Keep in mind that at that point, it will have been 15 years –FIFTEEN YEARS!—since Northwoods last called a settled minister (Rev. Ellen’s settlement began in mid-2008, so by the time you are voting to call your next settled minister in mid-2023, that’s fifteen years, roughly a third of Northwoods’ history!) So one of my goals as part of the larger goal of a successful ministerial search process will be education and awareness about the process as well as the relationship between a settle minister, church leadership, and the congregation as a whole, as well as supporting the search team chosen by the congregation.

**SABBATICAL PLANNING:** The dates of my mini-sabbatical will be **June 21 – August 2**. For all intents and purposes, I will be unavailable over this time The WA team has lined up a mighty schedule of worship guests, and I am working with Membership, Lay Ministry and Pastoral Care to ensure that there is adequate support for individuals during this time, as well as prepping staff to help cover some areas of ministry.

**ASK: I would like to have guest columns from various church leaders scheduled over the six weeks that I am on sabbatical to run in the Beacon Bits. If you would like to write something, or would like to suggest a guest columnist, please let me know.**

**REOPENING:** Yes, I buried the lede. I’ve attached the notes taken at Sunday’s town hall (Thanks Jerry Hensel and Margaret Davis!) for your reference during our discussion. I will also reiterate a couple of things that I shared at that town hall, which have been helpful to my thinking:

[Key Principles for Planning](#), From UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

- **As a faith community, we root our decisions in the values of inclusion and consent.** It’s important that everyone who gathers in person has the ability to consent to do so, so that no one is forced to choose between their congregation and the safety of themselves or their loved ones.
- **Follow the science.** Congregations should follow the latest CDC guidelines and local public health regulations to determine the best ways to move forward as the pandemic recedes.
- **Go slow and be flexible.** Now is the time to plan and consult with the people responsible and engaged in your programs. Take time to create a shared understanding of the risks.
- **Be humane and realistic with expectations of ourselves and others.** Remember, the goal is not perfection. The most important values in this time are care and compassion

**Questions to Consider:**

- What questions do we need to answer to make a good and complete policy?
- What do we need to consider about " \_\_\_\_\_ " before we start proposing ideas?
- Who is being impacted by this situation and what are their needs and concerns?

**And remember: “Good enough for now” and “Safe enough to try” ([short video](#))**

If time allows, I encourage you to read this article, [“So close we can taste it,”](#) from my colleague CB Beal as well, which lays out good reasoning for just how complex this process is. “Reopening” is a simple word, but underneath it there is so much—not just getting back to the building, but getting back to being the church in a different way, again, and staying committed to the inclusion and care that are hallmarks of our faith.

## ATTACHMENT: Reopening Town Hall Notes

Re-Opening Q&A May 16, 2021 (recorded by Jerry Hensel)

- 1) Are we going to have one or two services when we re-open? Our answer was that it is not decided. One service and zoom of that service has worked out well during lockdown.
- 2) Can this be an opportunity to do something new? We do not have to be frozen into making our services be the same as they were before lockdown. It would be great if we could find a way to allow RE Teachers and Parents attend the services.
- 3) We all know that making a big change is hard. (We may be sad when we have to change but great things can come from a change)
- 4) Vaccinations: Will we be asking if people are vaccinated before attending? We want to be inclusive with a high regard for safety for all.
- 5) The starting date must take Reverend Sarah's Sabbatical into account. (June 19-August 6)
- 6) A question of Sanctuary capacity came up.
- 7) Rusty pitched for a project manager to manage the tech side of our church. I understand that he has had multiple volunteers.
- 8) Safety concerns: No one on the Board is comfortable with saying no masking.
- 9) There is a concern that our area there are a lot of anti-mask feelings and COVID deniers.
- 10) Many might be comfortable with not wearing masks.
- 11) What about the Choir and Musicians, will they need to be masked? Who will be required to wear masks and who will be enforcing mask rules?
- 12) Not all who are not vaccinated are anti-vaxxers. Allergies to the vaccines, bad reactions may lead some to not want to get the vaccine.
- 13) We do believe that people will behave more responsibly in the NorthWoods Community.
- 14) There will be some self-selection of people who will not come at the beginning when we open.
- 15) Church business meetings will probably stay online mostly to avoid travel.
- 16) Millbend wishes to start up as soon as we give the go-ahead.
- 17) Can we have a zoom service and an in-person service at the same time. (not sure that this means, I would assume a zoom of the in-person service)
- 18) Can we have Adult Forum and RE Before the service, to allow people to get to lunch bunch.

Highlights from Sunday May 16 Re-Opening Town Hall discussion (recorded by Margaret Davis)

Sarah announced that there will also be a Zoom session on the topic of re-opening coming up Wednesday May 26 at 6 PM.

The Board of Trustees (BOT) are concerned and talking about re-opening. In particular, BOT does not want to require vaccination for persons in the building attending service (or otherwise).

It is a matter of privacy AND there can be valid medical reasons a specific person is unable to be vaccinated.

Plus, members could have young children at home who are still too young for COVID vaccination. As well as immunocompromised family members/partners at home to whom you do not want to bring the virus.

Plus, ours is an inclusive community by choice. And we want to attract visitors, not potentially raise a barrier by requiring vaccination before attending as a visitor.

Rev. Sarah said that we had gained 15 new members in this past ZOOM year. Some who had been around earlier but some who had never attended an in-person service.

Signing-up ahead of time was also mentioned as a possible way to make sure we do not “overflow” the congregation for in-person services.

If we do decide to require masks for entrance to our building, who will enforce this? We would have to have masks on hand to provide. Who will fund this in the long term?

Also, who wants to turn someone away either for no mask OR because the in-person attendance limit would be exceeded?

We talked about having ONE in-person service, not going to TWO services again anytime in the immediate future. The one service could also be hybrid (Zoom AND in-person).

We had videos during the service while we were still in-person. There is no reason to expect we can't have videos during in-person services in the future.

Someone said that they would like to see 10 AM Adult Forum followed by 11 AM Service. Then Lunch Bunch could go out before 1:30 PM.

Someone also said that two services would enable RE teachers to both teach AND still attend service (and not have to give up one or the other, etc.).

BOT is not looking for “perfection. Instead, looking for “Good enough for now. Safe enough to try.”

Rusty mentioned that Northwoods was currently in need to someone who could act in the capacity of Project Manager/Team Player Lead/Supervisor for all the technical aspects of the Worship Services. This would be a huge role to fill on an ongoing basis.

Rev. Sarah also mentioned that she has a mini-Sabbatical coming up from mid-June, all of July, and the first part of August. We have already lined up Sunday Zoom speakers. So all of those Sundays while Rev. Sarah is off will certainly be Zoom Sundays.