

Significant Moments

Friends, it has been a very busy and very good month since last I reported.

- We have had **successful Sunday services** – what is “success” as it applies to a service? It not numbers (although our attendance has been steady and solid). As a spiritual leader, I believe it is the impact upon people’s minds, hearts and lives that is our underlying mission. Is this a place that comforts us when comfort is needed, challenges us when justice and fairness demand it, builds friendships, labors with one another in loving kindness ... This can be measured tangibly but also intangibly. I especially want to thank the Sunday services Committee, its co-chairs Hal Gurian and Nancy Cotcamp [who are genuinely shining in this role], Paul and Paula Ward and Mark Gustafson who lead a very well received Sunday services well I was away on professional development.
I was deeply encouraged by the response to the **service on human trafficking**.
- I launched a little spiritual **book lunch discussion group**. A very special moment was when a participant said that being in our congregation, in that moment, was “the right place at the right time.” A real moment.
I also extend thanks to Emmy Lou Cholak who has successfully launched a **social justice book** discussion group.
- The professional development time was **inspiring and energizing**. One trip took me to the professional clergy OHALAH (rabbis, rabbinic pastors, cantors, and this year, ministers, imams and Buddhist priest) conference where I proudly offered a workshop on what we are doing here at UUCGT and did some standup comedy. The second was a teaching retreat where, for five days on the Texas/Oklahoma border, 60 Methodist ministers and lay leaders explored sacred text, silence and friendships with very wonderful people.
- Our **annual staff holiday party** was so fantastic. It was pure fun and joy.

How has my view of the future changed?

To be blunt, I am feeling hopeful again. It is not be in denial to state that there is slow healing happening, and the feel of things has calmed. We have work ahead to be sure, but I feel hopeful.

Update on Major Activities/Goals

Program Council – The Program Council now meets monthly. The January meeting was one of the best meetings I have ever attended (not a jest). It was energizing, informative and invigorating to hear the sharing of time and talent with which this congregation is blessed. For now I am acting as facilitator (not Convener) until we settled in to look at leadership of the PC. This means Susan is keeping committee chairs and representatives informed about when and where, I take notes and do some of the follow up work that is facilitator-ly (i.e., all committee chairs will have access to the fantastic online document we use for Sunday services planning, so I’ll get that set up). For now I am helping to hold the container of the PC, and I am finding it lovely role. To be with these leaders and hear their stories and even

their struggles – **the sharing of goodness at the center of this entire congregation** – is truly a joy to your senior spiritual leader. I am sure we have a member convener soon. Thank you to those who have come to the PC convening. (It felt less like a meeting and more like a gathering of wise people who love UUCGT and who want the best for everyone involved.)

Personnel/Staffing – I cannot thank our staff enough. Day in and day out, we work hard together, and this is done in a spirit of joy and camaraderie. We meet weekly as a staff team – numerous more times informally - set priorities, problem solve and offer share wisdom in getting the daily work of the congregation done. Above all, as a supervisor, my work here is to ask, “What can I and we do to help you do the best job you can and feel great about it?”

Committees – I continue to be communication with several committees formally and informally. I want to express my gratitude to the Committee on Ministry, Kay Sturgeon our chairperson, for taking up several important tasks, including the small group congregational conversations and acting as a “mirror” for me. This bears mentioning.

One thing that became clear to me over the last several months is that I am better at nearly every aspect of my job with I listen, consult wise people and slow down. I have asked CoM to help we see these things from “not my own” point of view: what do they see that I might not? Over the last month, *have I lived in covenant*, if so where? And if not where, and what is a next step?

I would also like to acknowledge, deeply, the work of the **communications task force**, headed by members Donna Stein-Harris and Linda Fletcher and liaised with Trustees Loraine Anderson and John Hoffman. It is important to note how very important the work of this group has been in getting conversation started across the congregation, and that this was a member-initiated action of time and talent to UUCGT.

I was excited and delighted at our Prospective Membership Orientation, with Cathy Annelin, Jane Watts, Tom Darnton and the incredible Mary Ann Force. The Membership Committee is so very successful in its work! It was a great hour, and we will be welcoming several new members soon, including families with young children.

I want to acknowledge the great work of our **Board of Trustees** in this last month. It is a pleasure to serve with you. Also special thanks to Karl Love for weekly meetings with me and deep, honest conversation.

Pastoral Issues – Linda Fletcher and Pat Light have been amazing in helping hold Pastoral Care with the wisdom and guidance it needs in this new time, after Arline’s passing. We will be looking models I have gathered of pastoral care teams and committees from numerous other Unitarian Universalist congregations to explore best practices and how we can best serve our own members. I’m interested to ask how we invite more members into the practice of pastoral care.

Safe Congregation Response Team – The team was unable to meet in the last month. We will look forward to scheduling soon.

Community – In addition to the professional conference and teaching retreat, where our mission to open hearts, challenge minds, support each and change the world, were

paramount, Brew office hours continue to be well attended and robust, and I offered pastoral assistance to the Kaskaskia sheriff's office as they process the death of their former sheriff. My upcoming class at NMC Extended Education **sold out!** The level of interest in real dialogue, learning and curiosity in this community is impressive.

Lifespan Experience: Thank you to our Director of Lifespan Experience Sarah Montgomery-Richards for holding several simultaneous priorities for the congregation. With her approval we have launched a new monthly "lunch and learn" book program.

The classes at 9 AM before services have been very well attended and received. I've just completed a cycle of learning on the six sources of Unitarian Universalism, and in March we do sessions on the seven principles. It is joy to learn together.

Stewardship – Judy Myers is leading us beautifully. Launch is coming up and there is great fun and celebration built in! I will be actively supporting stewardship from the pulpit, I have made my pledge for the upcoming year.

Questions for the Board

Based on my job description, how is the current balance of my work?

Is there anything you see that is not being attended to?

A Final Thought

"We have to slow down. Nothing will change for the better until we do. We need time to think, to learn, to get to know each other. We are losing these great human capacities in the speed-up of modern life, and it is killing us. The cure for despair is not hope. It's discovering what we want to do about something we care about".

Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*