



UNITY CHURCH – UNITARIAN

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**Unity Church – Unitarian Program Ministries Report  
July 1, 2024-May 15, 2025**



Access the program report online  
<https://bit.ly/ucuprorep2425>

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## **Board of Trustees and Staff List**

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## Introduction to the 2024-2025 Program Year Report

In 1841, Rev. Theodore Parker wrote what would become one of the most-quoted Unitarian sermons of the next two centuries. Preaching on “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity,” he argued that much of what makes up religion is temporary, cultural norms that come and go. What we should hold on to instead are the permanent truths that lie underneath all the denominations and disputes and culture that make up religious life.

There has been plenty of transience in Unity Church’s recent history! Much has changed in the last year and a half. Since January 2024, Unity Church has new staff: a Senior Minister, Executive Director, Finance Director, and Membership Coordinator. As we write this, we are preparing to hire a new Minister of Congregational Care.

The context outside of the church has also changed in the last year. The federal election in November elected Donald Trump to a second term as president of the United States and marked a resurgence of authoritarian power in this country. While churches are not political bodies, Unitarian Universalist values of equity, pluralism, and the democratic process have often been very publicly debated this year, and many of the policies the new administration advocates for directly contradict the values we proclaim every day.

This has also been a year where Unity’s Board of Trustees has led us in a process of discerning new Ends Statements, that will guide our work as a church over the next five years. The ends are a product of the time they come out of: a new ministry, and a complex cultural and political moment. What will it mean to evangelize love, together, in these times?

Theodore Parker did not simply lay out all the transient things in religion in 1841. His sermon leaned, instead, on what does not change. In the same way, for all the change of the last year at Unity Church, the institution and message remain largely the same.

There are new faces on staff and in leadership, but each of us sees our work in continuity with those who have come before us. If it is our time to carry the baton then we know that we are carrying it for those we will in turn hand off to. Our Ends Statements, similarly, are not a break from what has come before, but an iteration: what do our core values call us to do and be in *this* moment in the world?

The Sunday before the election, Rev. Sinclair preached that the sermon after the election would be the same regardless of who won on November 6: the work of the church remains the same regardless of who is in the Oval Office. The theologian Walter Bruggemann described that work this way:

“The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair.”

This report highlights the many ways ministers, staff, and volunteers lead and participate in the life of the congregation. Unity Church is a complex system, with many moving pieces and systems that need support and expertise. But underneath the numbers and programs, there is a simple imperative. In these times, even in the midst of transition and uncertainty, we will be the Church.

The Unity Church Executive Team  
Rev. K.P. Hong, Minister of Faith Formation  
Laura Park, Executive Director  
Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Senior Minister

## **Ends Outcomes Report**

Provided to the board November 2024 for the 2019-2023 Ends (extended through 2025)

### **Overview**

This document includes the:

- Unity Church-Unitarian 2019-2023 Ends
- Executive Team August 2024 interpretations of those ends
- The 2024 annual report on what progress we're seeing on the ends.

We would propose this be the last report on these ends and their outcomes and, as such, this report gives a more overarching sense of the journey these ends have taken the congregation on and what we see as the important questions for the next set of ends. This report will have less data but hopefully more insight for the board.

We propose this be the last report on these ends, even though we will have one more program year under them. It makes more sense for the Executive Team to invest its time in interpretation and implementation of the new ends than to assess the ones that will expire.

As you review this report, please consider these questions:

- What am I learning about our progress on these ends statements?
- Do I see reasonable progress?
- What implications do I see for the next set of ends?

## Report on Each End

Working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world, we the people of Unity Church-Unitarian:

### *Interpretation:*

*We understand this to be an encompassing statement that includes congregants of all ages, from visitors to disciples, doing the work of the church.*

*Within, among, and beyond must be equally important and integrated in the life of the church.*

### **1. Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.**

#### ***Interpretation:***

*The Beloved Community is inherently multicultural, and always aspirational. It grows from holy relatedness and requires deep humility. We acknowledge that we need help navigating the conflict and complexity inherent in this territory. Authentic relationships begin when we recognize and root out our assumptions and deepen through active curiosity and growing friendship. This work asks us to confront systems of oppression, disrupt white privilege and fragility, build bridges across differences, and embrace an ever-growing repertoire in every dimension of our ministry. We promise to embrace the discomfort and inevitable failures. We stay with the tension; we work to find the joy.*

#### ***Acknowledging the within, among and beyond dimensions of multicultural practice, congregants will:***

- 1. Identify Double Helix practices, within, among, and beyond, that could ground their spiritual and antiracism multicultural work and how these practices could work together.*
- 2. Name their cultural identity and its impact on their perception.*
- 3. Understand how identity does not equal capacity and name how that changes their perception of personal power.*
- 4. Testify to the joy of Beloved Community in the greater world.*

## **Outcomes Report**

### **We report reasonable progress.**

The new “congregants will” section in the interpretation above gives a fresh perspective on the benchmarks for realizing this end. The benchmark is not a multiplicity of cultures fully participating in congregational life together but instead a change of perceptions and practices for the people in our community, no matter what their background is.

Over the five years, we see progress toward these practices:

- This end made the greatest gain from 2019 to 2024 in its ratings on the congregational survey, even as it remained one of the three lowest-rated ends.

- In the five years since the ends went into effect, consideration of the Double Helix intersection of antiracist multiculturalism and spiritual practice has been embedded in most core church programs (Chalice Circles, UU Wellspring, Religious Education curriculum, music, Community Outreach Ministry Teams (COMTs), Finding Yourself at Unity and Committing to Unity). While people still struggle with the meaning of the Double Helix and its practices, we nevertheless find awareness of the model growing, along with a commitment to find practice within it.
- The discourse around reparations and land return specifically in the board, Development Ministry Team (DMT), COMT, and Beloved Community Staff Team (BCST).
- A welcome to the complexities of intersectionality, particularly as we add class and economic justice to our considerations.

We cannot imagine the substance of this work discontinuing given its core significance to the very meaning of building the Beloved Community.

**2. Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.**

***Interpretation:***

*Both personal practice and congregational worship ground us in our relationship to the holy, inspire reverence, and prepare us to engage change as it comes. Consistent personal spiritual practice and communal worship that expands our capacity for wonder, humility, and joy are essential expectations of church involvement. When we all bring our full selves into the worship experience, our particular stories, practices, and insights enrich communal worship, awaken the welcoming spirit among us, and help us realize holy relatedness.*

***Congregants will:***

1. *Clearly identify what spiritual practice, grounded in Unitarian Universalist faith tradition, is nourishing, grounding, balancing for them. Their practice will:
  - a) *Deepen their understanding of faith and connectedness.*
  - b) *Start with mindfulness and intention for seeking and deepening.*
  - c) *Bring them into communion with meaning and the Divine.**
2. *Engage in programs that help them find and deepen spiritual practice.*
3. *Consistently return to the work of spiritual practice, particularly when it seems to fail.*
4. *Choose the centrality of worship in their spiritual lives.*
5. *Understand the purpose of the worship liturgy (the practice of the people), both in person and online, and allow themselves to be formed by it.*
6. *Grow their capacity for intergenerational worship that brings people of all ages into the history, tradition, and many forms of worship at the church.*

**Outcomes Report**

**We report reasonable progress.**

In the 2024 congregational survey, this was the highest rated end, with positive growth since the first survey in 2019.

While we do not have data collection methods for all of the new “congregants will” items, we do have indicators for some:

- There are many indicators of an ongoing and potentially growing commitment to the centrality of worship. In-person and online attendance at worship is generally higher in 2024 over 2023, indicating an ongoing and potentially growing commitment to the centrality of worship:

	<b>2023 average (2 services)</b>	<b>2024 average (2 services)</b>
In-person	255	285
On-line	318	308

Total attendance	572	593
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However, in-person worship has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels and perhaps never will:

Year	Average Attendance (3 services)
2017	481 (highest in a decade)
2018	445 (more typical average)
2019	411

In terms of the impact worship had on survey respondents' spiritual well-being, it was the second-highest rated program, with 5.85 average on a seven-point scale.

Some survey comments:

- Several with some version of "I attend every Sunday"
  - "Sunday services never disappoint me. There is always something that will impact me spiritually."
  - "I have to always sit next to the tissue in the pew because I am so often moved to tears by the service."
- Comments on the congregational survey in response to people's hopes for Unity Church's future impact on the dimension of WITHIN indicate a strong interest in and commitment to spiritual practice, particularly in the numerous requests for more ways to understand and engage with spiritual practice.
  - Some reflections on people's engagement with spiritual practice programs:
    - Several of the 58 Chalice Circle participants in the 2023-2024 church year completed a feedback survey and multiple people describe it as the most transformative and grounding piece of their spiritual practice.
    - We had 17 participants register for UU Wellspring during the 2023-2024 church year and nine complete the whole program. UU Wellspring is a year-long exploration of the Six Sources of our living Unitarian Universalist faith tradition and helps participants develop personal practice, in collaboration with a spiritual director and with accountability to the group. (2024-25 16 registered; 2022-2023 15 registered and 8 completed; 2021-2022 14 registered and six completed).
    - About a dozen meditators join the weekly sangha practice.
    - We have 238 people in our choirs, including a youth choir and a children's choir, and many describe that as a primary spiritual practice.
    - Congregational Care is also spiritual practice for many of the congregants who serve.
    - Wellspring Wednesday programs on spiritual practice in 2023-2024 included:
      - Lectio Divina twice a month
      - Self-Compassion and Loving Kindness: Practice and Dialogue

- A 3-part series on spiritual practice in the fall followed by a “what’s next?” session in January.
- A Taste of Coming of Age (for adults to go through the five major questions of Coming of Age)
- Dying for Beginners series?

As a relatively more important end to the congregation, with relatively high engagement from the congregation, we would expect some form of this end to carry through to the next iteration of the ends. If the Double Helix model understands our antiracist multicultural work as co-formed by spiritual practice, then the focus on deepening spiritual practice remains an ongoing commitment.

**3. Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.**

***Interpretation:***

*We know and feel part of the unfolding story of liberal religion and use **our tradition** and our practices for self-reflection and action in the world. We understand teaching as a spiritual practice and cultivate the salvific potential of learning together as a multigenerational community. Together, we disciple ourselves to our living tradition through ritual and worship, in stories and by example. We confidently claim our faith and testify to its transforming power.*

***Congregants will:***

- 1. Name the sources of their Unitarian Universalist faith identity and how it informs the way they live their life.*
- 2. Choose to teach our children as a spiritual practice.*
- 3. Share the way in which Unitarian Universalism has shaped them and testify to the good news of the Beloved Community in the greater world.*

**Outcomes Report**

**We report reasonable progress.**

This end is in the group of higher-rated ends on the congregational survey; average rating is 5.96 on a scale of 1-7.

Participation in the programs specifically aligned with this end provide insight into both congregational engagement and challenges with this end:

**Religious Education for Children and Youth (RE).** This of course addresses the “teach it to our children” part of this end.

RE participation is still much lower than it was before the pandemic:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>
2022-23	259	113
2023-24	227	65
2024-25	221	87 (estimate)

This compares with 403 enrolled in the 2018-2019 church year.

The Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) gained a sixth member so is steadily returning to its pre-pandemic structure. This team is considering the potentially large impact the proposed changes to Article II could have on how RE teaches Unitarian

Universalist faith and identity. Additionally, we are convening a wider community conversation with parents to get a better understanding of their children's faith formation.

We are also still wrestling with the question congregations across denominational lines wrestle with as RE enrollment drops for all: How can we adapt to a changing culture so that our children can continue to develop a religious grounding for their lives? What will this mean for ends renewal?

### **Teaching Associates**

Teaching Associates are engaged throughout the congregation's ministries as resident theologians, sharing their understanding of Unitarian Universalist identity, and helping others develop their own. They are Worship Associates, Chalice Circle facilitators, UU Wellspring facilitators, board members, Welcome Team members and Bell Ringers, Teaching Associate mentors, and more. Two classes, totaling 18 Teaching Associates have now completed the three-year program with 15 participants currently in years one and two.

### **UU Wellspring**

This year-long exploration of the Six Sources of our living Unitarian Universalist faith tradition helps participants both articulate their faith identity and act on it in the world. Each session concludes asking, "So what?" and "Now what?" so participants connect their understanding of their faith with how it asks them to act in the world. See end #2 for more on UU Wellspring.

In the context of new ends development, and given the Article II changes, what is the theological core of Unity's faith formation and what connections need to be made between current curricula and Article II? This end also raises the work of faith formation via online ministries.

#### 4. Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people

##### ***Interpretation:***

*We acknowledge the fullness of being human by embracing the messiness, complexity, and beauty of our existence. Our hearts contain the capacity for good and evil and all that lies between. Religious community **weans us from the proxies of belonging that are driven by consumer capitalism and supports us as we counteract the epidemic of loneliness.** Religious Community welcomes both gifts and wounds across a diversity of human experience. **We claim a faith that breaks past fear and the multiple ways fear has structured an alienated society through tribalism, political polarization, and hyper-individualization. We proclaim a faith that leads toward Beloved Community.***

##### ***Congregants will:***

1. *Articulate the implicit agreements and expectations congregants have with each other, both as a whole community and in small groups, and the practices that come with those agreements.*
2. *Practice the commitments of membership to:*
  - a) *Develop practice to find and keep your balance.*
  - b) *Develop skills to go deep quickly with strangers.*
  - c) *Organize compassion to do good in the world.*
3. *Explore the congregation's cultural norms, what it means to belong, and how we can expand that belonging. Congregants will notice who is not in the room as they make decisions.*
4. *Transform areas of difference, tension, and conflict into opportunities for growth and differentiated relationship.*

##### **Outcomes Report**

##### **We report reasonable progress.**

This has consistently been one of the three lower-rated ends in this iteration of our church's ends although it had the second-greatest gain over the six years of ends tracking.

We also have evidence congregants are developing the capacities described in the "congregants will" section:

1. Almost every group sponsored by the church has a covenant guiding participant engagement. A few Community Outreach Ministry Teams still need to develop one, and there are some fellowship groups that don't have an expressed one, but the majority do have one.
2. Based on the comments in the congregational survey, as analyzed by Bill and ChatGPT, congregants are attuned to the membership expectations and working through the challenges of building their practices.

3. Exploring the church’s cultural norms around belonging is an area for future growth and development, and Rev. Oscar has already begun to preach on this.
4. Comments in the congregational survey affirm people are eager to develop skills in conflict transformation:
  - a. I hope that we not only continue small group intimacy, but we continue work on developing practices of conflicting well so that we can learn to handle mistakes caused by our individual privilege baggage in community.
  - b. Definitely a skill I am interested [in]. I have valued the conflict programs. How to make an apology. And deepening spirituality groups I have participated.

### **Related Programs and Participation**

**Transforming Conflict with Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley** explored some of the root causes behind conflict, learn about how to create a new culture of learning, explore tools for change, and engage with case studies to help us embody these learnings

**Creating Covenant, Transforming Conflict** with Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, a follow-up to Rev. Cooley’s work with us and connecting it with covenant.

**Online Congregation** We are still working to find the best and highest uses of technology in congregational life. What’s the theological basis for a hybrid approach to congregational life? What resources do we devote to including virtual participants?

**Membership.** 33 people signed the membership book 7/1/23-6/30/24, moving back to more typical numbers. Previous years:

Year	Number Joined
2022-23	17
2021-22	48 (23 just before ministerial call)
2020-21	32
2019-20	43
2018-19	45

Participation in Finding Yourself at Unity continues to increase: 91 people participated in at least one session compared with 88 last year and 84 the year before that. In addition, the size of the classes has significantly increased, indicating that people are attending more sessions.

Visitor trends are somewhat conflicting. While we’re seeing many new faces each Sunday, fewer people are letting us know they are visiting: 211 last church year vs. 245 people the year before that.

In the context of ends renewal, two considerations:

1. This end provides leverage for our work of building beloved community:
  - It's a relatively more important end: second most important
  - The congregation is relatively more inspired (fourth most) to contribute to this end.
  - When we look at the two segments of ends respondents, they agree on the relative importance of this end. This could provide a starting place for bringing together these segments to work on the whole of religious life together.
2. Noting the epidemic of loneliness and polarization in our wider world, this end names the ongoing work of a deeper, more resilient form of belonging that responds to loneliness and undergirds the capacity for conflict transformation. The language and focus on "differentiation" echoes the work toward "adaptation" on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI).

**5. Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow and transition.**

***Interpretation:***

*Congregational care is an expression of the relational ministry of the whole church, rooted in our covenantal theology and the dignity of personhood. Each of us accompanies one another during threshold moments, in times of celebration and in times of sorrow, during the short and long journeys of transition and challenge. Each of us finds the way to ask for accompaniment when we need it and receives it with gratitude. The Holy reveals itself in a tangible way in our mutual care for one another.*

***Congregants will:***

- 1. Practice vulnerability with one another, enabling them to ask for and receive care.*
- 2. Find their ministry of accompaniment, where they use empathy and presence without fixing.*
- 3. Through spiritual practice, celebrate joy in moments of suffering and recognize suffering in moments of joy.*
- 4. Respond to loneliness by creating belonging with one another.*
- 5. Stay engaged and resilient amid multiple, interlocking societal challenges.*

**Outcomes Report**

**We report compliance.**

As the congregation's second-highest rated end in the recent congregational survey, this end has consistently represented a congregational strength, with congregants seeing it as both important and inspiring to contribute toward its realization.

We invest significant resources in congregational and pastoral care (see the list below), so that people know that no matter what your crisis, Unity Church stands ready to be with you.

The opportunity for growth with this end lies in developing the practices in "congregants will" above that require vulnerability, as seen in this sampling of survey comments in response to the question about people's hopes for our Among work as a congregation:

- Hope for among: That we could learn to be vulnerable and good listeners
- Culturally, it's a high bar for us. Self-protection is more the norm, which reduces small group intimacy.
- I can go deeply with others if I feel safe and seen. As a person whose family is impacted mental illness, financial struggles (yes, even as a white person) and chronic pain, I have not sought out Unity as a place to have these deep conversations in the last few years.
- Working on the belonging piece will make it easier for people to trust and be willing to go deep.
- I think we have done a pretty good job of learning how to do this....how to create safe space and then share openly among ourselves.

Perhaps the next iteration of this end could shift the focus toward that development.

### **Program Investment in Congregational and Pastoral Care**

- Monthly Congregational Care team meetings that assign people to follow up with individuals needing care, and spiritually ground Care Team members for their work. We have 13 active Care Team members who have participated this past year in training to deepen their skills. Most have ongoing individual care assignments and all are at the ready to respond to and support incoming requests as needed.
- Embracing Meditation every Sunday
- 300-400 cards congregants send a year (6-8 a week)
- The wide reach and deep impact of comfort shawls knitted by congregants. 20 shawls were delivered with care and compassion this past year. Even people reluctant to receive pastoral care in other ways are willing to receive a shawl.
- More than 20 memorial services between September 2023 and September 2024 for members and non-members. We do not charge members for these services and as a result they become a deeply meaningful source of pastoral care and a cornerstone of the church's caring ethic. Many members experience pastoral care for the first time in the counseling that we provide from the moment of death through planning and performing the service. Memorial services also serve as outreach and new members regularly find us through them.
- Calls and visits made by all ministers and the entire staff.
- Special programming on care topics, including the Dying for Beginners series.
- Three monthly support groups, held online to serve a wider geographic range and to make them more accessible, including groups for Caregivers, Grief, and Families Living with Mental Health Challenges.
- Ministerial service to our elders at Episcopal Homes and Lexington Landing with monthly group visits.
- Unity's Threshold Choir now established and is the only official Threshold Choir in the Twin Cities offering bedside singing to people dying, across denominational lines.

The opportunity for this end is not only to consider its impact within and among but beyond. How do we as congregants offer care to the broader community and ourselves in the context of the forces shaping this moment in world history and the way it creates suffering both in the world and in us?

**6. Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people and our Earth and all life on it.**

***Interpretation:***

*We encourage and challenge ourselves and one another to live out our faith in the world with personal and congregational commitments to justice, equity and healing. We invite the power of these commitments, deepened by our spiritual practices, to change our hearts and lives and to help us discern practices of renunciation in order to make room for what needs to grow. We will linger in the discomfort of not knowing long enough to find our place, personally and congregationally in the wider movements seeking justice, equity and ecological wellness in the world.*

***Congregants will:***

- 1. Develop practices of sustainability, equity, and justice and discern what they might give up to make room for something new.*
- 2. Explore new understandings of land ownership, consumption, and care.*
- 3. Find humility in decentering humanity's place in the interconnected web.*
- 4. Articulate the intersectionality of ecological/environmental and racial justice.*
- 5. Engage with their responsibility to bless the world.*

**Outcomes Report**

**We report compliance, even as we note, as with many ends, the opportunity for additional growth.**

This is the third-highest rated end on the congregational survey (6.09), with meaningful progress over the years the ends were in place (gain of 0.14).

Here are some observations about whether congregants are developing the five identified practices above:

1. We have nine officially re-commissioned Community Outreach Ministry Teams (COMTs) as of October 29, 2024 to help congregants build these practices. At least 113 congregants actively engage with these groups and many more are on their mailing lists and participate in the teams' education, advocacy, and outreach actions. The opportunity, as we work with these teams, is to help them and the rest of the congregation discern what they might give up to make room for something new. See the final paragraph on this end.
2. We offered several Wellspring Wednesday programs on these topics throughout the 2023-2024 church year, and while we do not have precise numbers of attendees, we know they were some of the best-attended of the year. These include sessions on:
  - a. Food waste
  - b. The American Indian Recovery Act
  - c. The Doctrine of Discovery
  - d. Mitakuye Oyasin Poems and Words from a Dakota Poet's Journey

- e. The Process and Politics of Reparations in St. Paul
  - f. Planetary Health: Envisioning Our Future with New and Ancient Eyes
  - g. Hidden Hunger
3. While Wellspring Wednesday programs and other messages from Act for the Earth are designed to help us find humility in decentering humanity's place in the interconnected web, this is a new way for us to track the progress on this end, and we do not have specific data to offer as to whether people are changing perspectives.
  4. Again, the Wellspring Wednesday programs above address the intersectionality of ecological/environmental and racial justice, but since this is a new way for us to track the progress on this end we do not have specific data to offer about whether people are actually changing perspectives.
  5. Some ways in which we engage with our responsibility to bless the world as individuals and as an institution:
    - a. Our policies include specific commitments to equity and justice in how the church deploys its resources that the board monitors for compliance.
    - b. Our Act for Earth COMT asks people how they are changing their energy, food, travel, and waste practices.

We continue to wrestle institutionally and individually with what is being asked of us as a predominantly white and economically privileged congregation in a time of social change, and this question appears most urgently within the work of our teams asking what proximity with our community partners and moral owners requires of them. Their partnerships are both more critical and in some cases being more deeply tested by our need to learn how to step up boldly while following the lead of existing partners and perhaps cultivating new partnerships. This has been particularly true of the Racial and Restorative Justice team as they struggle to determine with whom to build partnership.

We also witnessed teams that took meaningful steps to incorporate racial justice explicitly in their issue areas. Act for the Earth and Indigenous Justice COMTs have been explicit about the relationship between their work and undermining white supremacy and the attention needed to heal the injustices from settler colonialism.

As we look toward ends renewal, we would note that this end uniquely asks us, as we give attention to all forms of life on the planet, what comes after the human *subject*? Can we move to creatureliness instead of a focus on the human subject?

## 7. Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.

### **Interpretation:**

*As an expression of a covenantal faith tradition, brave space invites us into authentic relationships that allow us to imagine and experience new ways of being and help to heal old wounds. With particular attention to the antiracism front door in the House of Intersectionality\*, we learn to confront oppression and exploitation in ourselves and in others, make mistakes, and enter into accountable relationships that lead to change. In brave space we turn down the volume of the dominant culture and amplify voices that fight to be heard.\*\* We will learn to be together in new ways, practice sharing power, sing new songs, pray new prayers.*

*\*The House of Intersectionality given to us by Team Dynamics and included at the end of this document.*

*\*\*This sentence drawn from the work of Micky ScottBey Jones.*

### **Congregants will:**

1. *Explore questions of class and race in this stage of late capitalism and dominant culture.*
2. *Recognize the characteristics of white dominant culture and engage their antidotes in their interactions with one another.*
3. *Imagine and speak to what joy could come next for our earth and its people as we dismantle dominant culture.*
4. *Skillfully navigate the conflict inherent in this work and learning.*
5. *Identify Double Helix practices, within, among, and beyond, that could ground their spiritual and antiracism multicultural work and how they could work together.*
6. *Engage with the complexity of this work and avoid asking someone else to do it for them.*

### **Outcomes Report**

**We report reasonable progress.**

This is the lowest-rated end (average rating 5.37) and throughout the years this end has seen essentially no movement in its rating. This is the end people tell us makes them uncomfortable, and the board's challenge for the next iteration of ends will be to discern whether that challenge is exactly what we need. We would argue that phrase is the grain of sand that will ultimately create a pearl. Some related comments from the survey:

- I think when the words are to dismantle the dominant culture we should be trying to create a shared new culture. I think we are moving in that direction but still some cultural beliefs are not accepted.
- I find the phrase "dismantling the dominate culture" divisive and counter productive to our effort to be a spiritual home of all those who appreciate the historical work to make our church the wonderful community it is.
- I want to explain my low scores for multi culturalism. I believe if we put more energy in to dismantling dominant culture, the by product will be multi culturalism in a

more natural way as opposed to having it as an end statement, which feels a bit like working an experiment from the desired outcome.

- I believe Unity has an opportunity to re-imagine anti-racist work, racial healing work and dismantling dominant culture work in a manner that de-centers Unity, and instead seeks to engage with and support marginalized communities in ways that are most wanted and needed by the marginalized communities.
- I am troubled by the phrase "dismantling dominant culture," which is why I chose "neutral" for each item in which it occurs.

Evidence that the six "congregants will" statements are being realized:

1. We offered several Wellspring Wednesday programs on race and dominant culture throughout the 2023-2024 church year, and while we do not have precise numbers of attendees, we know they were some of the best-attended of the year. Our next work is to integrate the issues of class and economic justice. The related Wellspring Wednesday sessions from the 2023-24 church year include:
  - c. Theologies of Racial Justice
  - d. The American Indian Recovery Act
  - e. The Doctrine of Discovery
  - f. Mitakuye Oyasin Poems and Words from a Dakota Poet's Journey
  - g. The Process and Politics of Reparations in St. Paul
2. We did intense work on white dominant culture and its antidotes as a congregation throughout the pandemic, in our relationship with Team Dynamics. The Engaging Awareness, Disrupting Dominance session in December 2023 with Alfonso Wenker, sponsored by the Ministerial Search Team, continued this work and added layers of practice and nuance. Our challenge now is to know how and if that work is changing congregants' practices.
3. We need to invite testimony about the joy in this work to know if people can give it.
4. See comments on conflict with end #4.
5. We have provided programs on both sides of the Double Helix and how they can interact and ground congregants for this work. Our challenge now is to discover how and if congregants are developing them.
6. Groups and teams throughout the church's ministries regularly and deeply engage in the complexity of this work, including participants in worship, in Community Outreach Ministry Teams, in the Antiracism Literacy Partners (now the Justice Literacy Partners), the Board of Trustees, Teaching Associates, and Worship Associates. Our challenge is always to expand that participation broadly.

Three analytics for dismantling white supremacy that we as a congregation will need to deepen as we respond to this end:

- Intersectionality
- Racial capitalism
- Settler colonialism

## 8. Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.

### ***Interpretation:***

*Gratitude rests at the heart of our faith. When we embrace the gifts of the church and put them to work in the world, we understand the significance of the church in new ways. As disciples to our faith and its teachings, we hold the church in trust, testify by example, and steward its resources as an expression of the promises we make to each other and the world. Our gratitude extends to and undergirds our commitment to the larger Unitarian Universalist movement and our shared mission in the world.*

### ***Congregants will:***

- 1. Give joyfully of their time, talent, and treasure.*
- 2. Engage with the stewardship of the church's mission, ends, and resources as an extension of their faith.*

### **Outcomes Report**

**We report reasonable progress.**

The average rating of this end in the congregational survey is 5.81, high enough to be considered a good result, despite the trend moving slightly down over the last six years.

We know that congregants are giving of their time, talent, and treasure although we can't quantify the joy. Some supporting statistics:

- Total pledging increased 5.9%, 2024 over 2023. This stays ahead of the 3.5% rate of inflation from 1/1/2023 to 11/4/2024 but we have not stayed ahead of inflation from 2019 to 2024 (23.33% vs. pledge increase of 11.5%). However, when so many congregations are struggling to stay afloat financially, today's level of support is extraordinary.
- Congregants participate in the spiritual stewardship of the church as an extension of their faith. We have:
  - 18 Teaching Associates who have completed the three-year program and 15 participants currently in years one and two, who deeply consider the meaning of the church's teachings in their own lives and help others embody the church's teachings in their lives.
  - Ten current Worship Associates and 74 previous ones, who offer their own lives and experiences as invitation to spiritual deepening in worship.
  - Nine trustees. The board has increasingly focused on Double Helix practice in board meetings.
  - Seven members of the Development Ministry Team (DMT). The initial conversations of the DMT focused on spiritual and ethical questions about the meaning of money and endowment in institutional life before they turned to the questions of our financial model.

- Participation in the Heritage Society continues to grow and the Gift Planning team on the Development Ministry Team is now poised to help it grow more rapidly. Since we began in 1992 (the year the church created the Heritage Society) 268 individuals have informed the church that they have named Unity Church in their legacy plans. These plans are revocable and often don't specify amounts, so there's no real way to know how much money this represents.
- We have steadily re-established our relationship with the Unitarian Universalist Association over the course of the Eller-Isaacs' ministry and into our interim time. In addition to providing leadership in many aspects of denominational life, we increased our financial support and are now at 73% of fair share in our 2024-2025 pledge, up from 65%.
- We also have strategic priorities for this year to re-establish Unity Church as a teaching congregation and to build the relationship with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

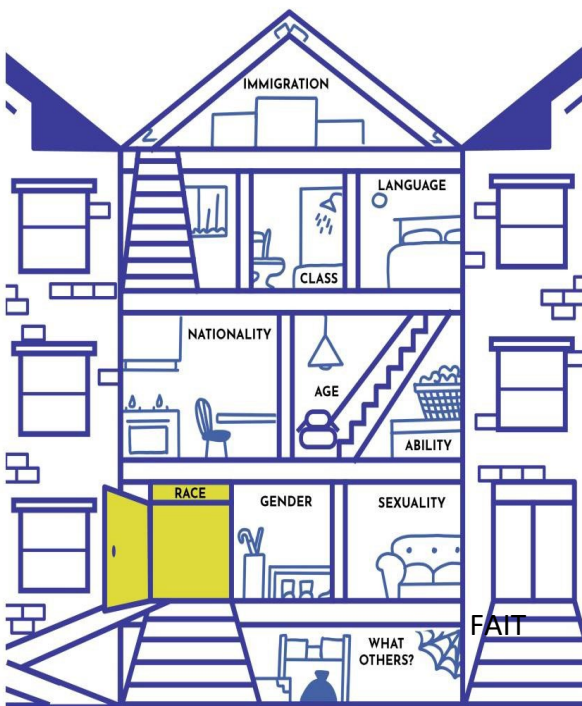
Looking forward to ends renewal, we would suggest looking at this end in more relational terms. What do we also receive from the UUA that is sustaining?



## Team Dynamics' House of Intersectionality

### Differences Making the Difference

Team Dynamics' House of Intersectionality is a tool that **helps focus** on the elements of our identities that are currently ***the differences making the difference*** in the United States of America and its colonies. Bias, discrimination, harassment, and violence based on aspects of identity are both predictable and pervasive. Each of us is a multiplicity of identities. Team Dynamics uses the house graphic to illustrate how individuals, teams and whole organizations can approach intersectionality through purposeful self-reflection. We invite you to make your way through each room of the house, taking time to reflect on all the ways that your experiences of identity (ways you are treated, assumptions you make, cultural behaviors you have learned, expectations you have) have shaped your lived experience.



We focus on these particular rooms on purpose. **Gaps and disparities** related to our physical, emotional, and financial safety, health, and well-being are rooted in disparate treatment of whole kinds of people. Research shows that these disparities happen at all four levels of interaction: personal, interpersonal, institutional, structural: that is why the experiences are so widespread.

You must move through the “race door” to enter our house. That is because, currently in the USA, race is the single most significant difference making the difference in how people are talked about, treated and experience the systems they interact with daily. Therefore, we define our work as intersectional, **centered in race**. **Said another way, when we add a race analysis**

**to any other “room” or identity in the house people of color and indigenous people are having worse outcomes than white people across all aspects of identity.**

**Questions to Consider** What is the impact of your mix of identities in multiple contexts:

- ❖ **At work**, which three rooms in this house are you conscious of most? Least?
- ❖ **In your neighborhood**, which three rooms in this house are you conscious of most? Least?
- ❖ **When interacting with someone in authority** (for example: the police, a doctor, a teacher), which three rooms in this house are you conscious of most? Least?

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## **Administration**

During the 2024-2025 church year, we continued the work of administrative and financial transition. Julie Fliflet, Director of Finance, set up Quickbooks as our financial management software and payroll processor. Quickbooks offers more flexibility and transparency in processing financial transactions and produces financial reports better aligned with standard accounting practice. The transition to Quickbooks took significant effort that will provide dividends for years to come. In addition, Julie streamlined and systematized a number of financial processes, including Sunday offering collections, receipt of stock donations, batch processing, and accounts payable.

Long-time Financial Assistant Song Thao continued her able support throughout the transitions.

Other aspects of our administrative ministry continued, including:

**Livestreaming our Sunday services, memorials and other events** under the direction of Martha Tilton, our livestream executive producer. You can visit Unity's YouTube channel to watch past and current services. We're grateful to our sound team for their excellent support of events in the Sanctuary: Johnny Balmer, Heidi Birkholz, Vladimir Garrido, Lucas Martin, Lizzie Nelson, Mo Todd.

**Communications.** Martha Tilton, in her 18<sup>th</sup> year as Director of Communications, managed a myriad of communications channels (newsletter, emails, social media, website, outdoor sign, and indoor screens with rotating events displayed), ensuring the quality and clarity of our message across all platforms. We are so grateful for her dedication, wisdom, skill, and creativity.

**Memorial Services,** compassionately supported by our Events and Tech Coordinator, Heidi Birkholz, and our memorial service reception team, led by Barbara Ford. Thank you to the mighty crew of bakers of bars and cookies, and to those who provided kitchen service and support at memorial services. Additionally, we would like to thank Terry Linskey and Laura Riskedahl-Hampton for their dedication in memorial coordination along with a wonderful crew of greeters and bell tollers to help these families say good-bye to their beloved. Unity also offers Guest Memorials for a fee to those who are unaffiliated with a church but want to gather their loved ones to say goodbye. Offering this service is a form of outreach to the wider community, drawing our circle wider still to support families during a difficult time.

**Front Desk Volunteers.** Our dedicated front desk volunteers, led by Peter Heege, enhanced our ministry of hospitality with their warm welcome at the Holly Avenue entrance, phone call screening, and help with mailings, napkin folding, silverware rolling, and other tasks. Front desk volunteers in 2024-2025 were Peter Heege, Marty Rossmann, John Sherman, Sharon Merritt, Betsy Moore, Terry Linskey, Jo Lucas, Joan Maclin, Daphne Thompson, Mary Ashmore, Colleen Zuro-White, Sue Doffing, Stephanie Steel, Jerry Grunstad and Bob Albrecht. Mike Schwab has asked to be added to the rotation.

## **Beloved Community Staff Team**

Reflections and Highlights

Submitted by Rev. K.P. Hong, Minister of Faith Formation

In his final essay, “A Testament of Hope,” Martin Luther King, Jr., explained that the “black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes,” more than narrowly about civil rights. It was also about “forcing America to face all of its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism.” The movement was “exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.” The struggle for Black liberation opened a deeper interrogation of U.S. society for King, most critically that the push for racial equality was everywhere intertwined with broader struggles for workers' rights, fair wages, and an insurgent democratic socialism. For even as the civil rights movement was valorized for its intervention in the Jim Crow South, it appeared to have little lasting impact in the northern ghettos and the racial discrimination at work in the obscured actions of real-estate brokers, bankers, employers working against unionization, and other agents of a racialized capitalism. With his political maturation, King began to publicly articulate an anti-capitalist analysis, calling for a multiracial working-class movement, and telling journalist Jose Yglesias in *The New York Times Magazine*, “In a sense you could say we are engaged in the class struggle.” Or as Malcolm X famously asserted, “You can’t have capitalism without racism.” Or as scholar and activist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes, “Racism in the United States has never been just about abusing Black and Brown people just for the sake of doing so. It has always been a means by which the most powerful have justified their rule, made their money, and kept the rest of us at bay. To that end, racism, capitalism, and class rule have always been tangled together.”

The generative edge of our antiracist multicultural work over the past year focused on the “interrelated flaws” of U.S. society which have only intensified over time. How can we engage the prophetic task of unveiling racism as a class weapon, and see more clearly into the intersection between capitalist exploitation and racial oppression? Often in the contest to demonstrate how oppressions differ from one group to the next, we miss how we are also inescapably connected through oppressions, and how those connections can form the basis of a deep and necessary solidarity. Capitalism, as a system premised on the exploitation of the many by the few, benefits from divide-and-conquer tactics of “strategic racism,” redirecting public frustration away from extreme economic inequality to racial scapegoats, obstructing cross-racial solidarity and blunting the collective consciousness and power of working-class people.

Critically, this intersectional focus is not a “class before race” frame (which often faults antiracist radicals as dividing the progressive left) nor a “race and class” frame (a do-both approach which often leaves people unclear about why they should spend limited energy and resources on issues not primary to them). Instead, the necessary work is the development of a “race-class” strategy (a *race-hyphen-class* approach) that emphasizes the inseparability of racial and economic justice in both our history and current politics. Addressing one without the other is insufficient. The race-class narrative is the critical throughline for the broad middle of the

electorate toggling between contrasting visions of the world, building a deeper solidarity against the politics of manipulating racial resentment. Advancing this race-class intersectionality continued throughout the past year, toward a more complex and comprehensive engagement along several fronts, including:

- Reparations work and bringing together the Board of Trustees, the Racial Justice Team, and members of The Saint Paul Recovery Act Community Reparations Commission as “moral owners” in the unfolding work of reparations. Focus was given to support the Reparation Commission’s request for a harm study that can strategically provide an evidence-based foundation for addressing historical injustices, from identifying affected communities and documenting generational harm to an in-depth analysis of policies, practices, and events contributing to generational disparities and shaping reparative policies.
- Continuing the work of embedding antiracist and spiritual practices—strands braided together in our “double helix” blueprint for building the beloved community—across ministries and programs, including a Lenten spirituality series and a gathering of Community Outreach Ministry Teams for the annual summit.
- Collaborating with the work of the Communications Team (of the Beloved Community Staff Team) in shaping timely newsletter articles and thoughtful expository writing that not only reports but shapes ideas and discourse that inform, inspire, and further our antiracist multicultural ends.
- Working with the Communications Team to amplify the question of belonging as a widely embraced priority within congregational life, and to support the ongoing “All Our Fullness” project. The collection and growing archive of congregational stories aims toward “knowing each other in all our fullness and creating an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.”

But at the generative core is the question of expanding our work into the “interrelated flaws” rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society, especially at the intersection of race and class. Contemporary neoliberal capitalism continues to combine the exploitation of work and the extraction of natural resources along the lines of class and race, making intersectionality an irreplaceable and necessary approach for social transformation. What the liberation movements in our history reveal—abolitionism, suffragism, civil rights, ecojustice, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, labor, and various indigenous socialist efforts—is that intersectionality also holds the promise of a deeper solidarity that can pursue the revolutionary reconstruction of society itself.

**Members of the Beloved Community Staff Team:** Lara Cowtan, Drew Danielson, KP Hong, Laura Park, Lia Rivamonte, Oscar Sinclair, Angela Wilcox.



## **Community Outreach Ministry**

Unity's Community Outreach Ministry Teams (COMT) invite church members and friends to live out our liberal religious values in the greater world as they engage the rich and challenging work of education, advocacy, and service related to particular issues and community needs. Each ministry team partners with one or more organizations addressing the team's focus area and the teams, in turn, engage the congregation in joining action with spiritual reflection in the work of transforming the human heart and the wider world.

This year's teams and their ministry settled into new patterns in staffing and surrounding context. Continuing a transition from 2023-24, there is no single staff member solely dedicated to community outreach ministries, rather each of Unity's three ordained ministers served as primary liaison to several groups. The ministers also led a COMT Summit in February, which explored the concept of "moral ownership" in Unity's structure, as well as encouraging work across teams.

Following the United States Federal elections in November 2024, Unity's Sanctuary Justice Team applied to become a formal Community Outreach Ministry Team, and they were welcomed into that role in December.

Highlights of programming led by COMTs this year include, but are not limited to:

- Racial Justice COMT's program Urgency of Awareness, two workshops with consultant Jodi Pfarr helping us embrace a broader understanding of diversity and increase our awareness to support human interaction.
- Indigenous Justice COMT's programs and book read with Sarah Augustine, co-founder and executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, and author of *The Land Is Not Empty*.
- Housing Justice COMT's program with Black Lives UU (BLUU) Executive Director Lena Gardner on BLUU's cooperative housing initiative.
- Act for the Earth COMT's Active Hope and Mindful Meditation: A Response to Our Environmental Crisis, a program they did in collaboration with the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center.
- Partner Church COMT's coordination of a pilgrimage led by Rev. Lara Cowtan to our partner church village in Homorodszentpeter.

## **Housing Justice Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Oscar Sinclair

Community partners: Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, Project Home, and Faith Builders Habitat for Humanity Collaboration.

## **Evergreen Projects Ministry**

Staff Liaison: Rev. KP Hong

Community partners: The Family Place, Hallie Q. Brown Food shelf, Jeremiah Transitional Housing Program, Obama School

**Gun Violence Prevention Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Oscar Sinclair

Community partner: Protect Minnesota

**Mano a Mano Ministry Team (“Hand to Hand” in Spanish)**

Staff Liaison: Rev. KP Hong

Community partner: Mano a Mano International Partners

**JJ Hill/Obama Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. KP Hong

Community partner: Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School and J.J. Hill Montessori School

**Partner Church Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Oscar Sinclair

Community partner: Unitarian church in Homorodszentpeter, Transylvania, Romania

**Racial and Restorative Justice Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. KP Hong

Community partners: Amicus (Second Chance Coalition), Rondo Circle of Peace

**Act for the Earth Ministry**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Lara Cowtan

Team Community partners: Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light

**Indigenous Justice Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Lara Cowtan

Community partners: Dakota and Ojibwe neighbors and leaders of the Minnesota Indigenous tribal nations and the Twin Cities Repair Community, working to preserve language, culture, land recovery, and spiritual life and to restore broken treaties.

**Sanctuary Justice Ministry Team**

Staff Liaison: Rev. Oscar Sinclair

Community Partners: Still emerging, but contacts include:

- Faith-based partners: Local UUA congregations, MARCH, ACT, ISAIAH: Faith in Action, MNIPL, Jewish Community Action, UUA;
- Secular partners: Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), International Institute, MNLaw, Advocates for Human Rights, Take Action, Out Front, Local and State government entities

## **Congregational Care Program/Ministry Report**

The 2024/2025 program year saw Congregational Care continue to develop and strengthen in numbers of active team members, engagement with and from the congregation, and with new and ongoing programs and groups. This year has felt like things are settling in in many ways without major transitions, conflict or concerns – outside of the general angst caused by the political environment. Comfort Shawls continue to be knit and distributed, cards continue to be written (lots of them!) on Sunday to folks in the Embracing Meditation, and people are showing up for each other and for their own self-care in wonderfully caring ways. It has been a joy and honor to serve as Unity's Congregational Care Minister, and to watch it develop.

### **Congregational Care Team and Ministry**

- Meetings - The monthly meeting of the Care Team typically includes an informational or learning segment, with a guest presenter (Care Giving, Death Dula, Dementia, etc) or one of the team sharing a learning from their UUA Training, or Rev. Lara talking about a theme. There is a check-in, program planning, invitation for people to ask for/provide support, blessing of shawls that have been knit, and any other business. We do not discuss private information about people's care recipients in the group, unless there may be a case study type of learning together.
- Caring Visitors – We currently have a robust list of 16 people who are trained and willing to provide their care to the Unity Community. Care Team Leads Bill Etter, Signe Nestigen, and Linda Kjerland work with Rev. Lara to match congregants to a Caring Visitor.
- Helping Hands – These are people happy to be of use when available for short-term needs, or to help out with a ride or chore or occasional support.
- Lay Chaplain – This is a Care Visitor who has special training in ministry or chaplaincy who may be available to support people as they face challenges of terminal diagnoses or nearing the end of life, along with the Congregational Care Minister.
- Comfort Shawls – this is a special part of the Care Ministry, with many talented knitters providing shawls to Helen Pohlig, who finishes them and keeps track of them and makes sure they all get a good blessing from our team before they are delivered with love.
- Continuing Care – this is an exciting new program that has been launched in the last couple of months but has been in the works for over a year. Continuing Care will be a rolling list of people who will receive calls every three or four months from a Care Team member just to check in and see how they are doing and if they need any further support. These are people who we have identified as being isolated, having ongoing medical concerns, or who could just benefit from a bit of special attention. The list will also flag anniversary dates of loved-one's deaths, so that cards and calls can provide support at those tender times.

### **Embracing Meditation (EM)**

Weekly submissions to be included in the EM on Sundays are responded to, edited and included in the Sunday worship as well as printed for the Congregational Care table for cards to be

written, and sent out in a group email to the Care Team and some others who have requested receiving the EM listings. The EM during worship is a time for sharing of cares within the community and also for holding silence which people say they find deeply meaningful. The wording to introduce and frame it is adapted slightly regularly, so that it is still familiar, but not entirely repetitive and allowing space for inclusion of special contextual focus (natural disaster, mass shooting, special holiday observance, etc.). Rev. Lara sometimes writes a prayer or mediation or finds/adapts one, and sometimes the silence and bell are enough.

### **Worship**

The Congregational Care Minister has been present and leading the Embracing Meditation for all regular worship services except on her Sundays off and also prepares and leads a full Sunday once a month, working with Worship Associates and writing a sermon.

### **Finding Yourself at Unity**

Congregational Care is one of the topics in the Finding Yourself at Unity series for newcomers. Rev. Lara leads a conversation about what Congregational Care at Unity is, expanding on what is written on the webpage about the Care Team, Comfort Shawls, EM, Pastoral Care, and more.

### **Blue Holiday Service**

Annual evening service in Ames Chapel for folks who are feeling grief during the Advent time.

### **Winter Solstice Service**

Not explicitly a Congregational Care service but certainly was well-attended and appreciated for the Earth-Centered focus.

### **Pastoral Ministry Meetings**

Rev. Lara often meets during office hours at Unity or at outside locations for pastoral conversations with couples or individuals at their request for various types of support, making referrals to counseling professionals or arranging follow-up by Caring Visitors as appropriate.

### **Support Groups**

Monthly support group meetings continue on Zoom with lay leaders managing the communications and co-facilitating with Rev. Lara (or solo when only one of us is available).

- Living with Grief Group Linda Kjerland co-facilitating
- Care Giver's Support Group Cynthia Orange co-facilitating
- Families Living With Mental Health Challenges Support Group Angie Scott co-facilitating.
- NEW - Parents who have had a child die by suicide – a new and closed group which came out of the January 5 "All Grief" session and decided to continue to meet regularly every 6 weeks in-person, facilitated by Linda Kjerland.

### **Memorial Services**

At the time of writing this report, there will have been 17 memorials at Unity between August 2024 – June 2025, with Rev. Shay McKay taking three of the four guest services. This is a

significantly and blessedly lower number of deaths than the previous year. Rev. Lara and Rev. Oscar co-led one large service, and Oscar will lead one in June, with Lara leading the remainder.

### **Elder Community Groups**

Monthly meetings at two of St. Paul's retirement facilities have been growing in number as new UU residents move in and also with non-UU participants joining. We have been using the monthly Theme Spiritual Practice packages to guide our lively, thoughtful and rich discussions, and these groups seem to be thriving well. Episcopal Homes folks even gather in a community room to watch Sunday worship livestreamed together. Ari Giles has happily agreed to accompany Lara to these groups in April and May and then continue to lead them through the transition. The folks at both sites are delighted with this, and many are familiar with Ari.

- **Lexington Landing Group** Barbara Ford manages communications and room reservations.
- **Episcopal Homes Group** Christine Butter manages this group and picks up copies of the order of service and practice packets from Martha.

### **Special Congregational Care Programs in 2024/2025**

- Holding All Our Grief – Sunday, January 5, following the Tolling of the Bells service, we held a two-hour session for people to share in small table or break-out groups different categories of grief that they were carrying, with Care Team members at each table to provide facilitation and support as needed, as well as having Rev. Shay McKay present to assist Rev. Lara with any extra pastoral issues that might arise.
- Election Vigil – November 6 in Ames Chapel
- Death Café – Wellspring Wednesday October 30 and May 7.
- Dying for Beginners: Three February Wellspring Wednesday sessions: Taking Charge of Your End-of-Life Decisions, Empowering Informed Decisions, Completing the Circle: Conversations and Legacy
- Twin Cities Congregational Care Training – two Saturday workshops January 25 and February 15 led by Rev. Karen Hutt, 44 total participating with some from White Bear and First Universalist.

\*Care Team Members active in 2024/25:

Signe Nestingen, Bill Etter, Linda Kjerland, Warren Davidson, Cynthia Mills, Eric Henderson, Ruth Palmer, Ari Giles, Helen Pohlig, Carol Mahnke, Bridget Borell, Laurel Lein, Tom Grove, Sarah Armstrong, Mallory LaSonde, Ron Prieve, Cathy Walsh, Mary Baremore.

Submitted with gratitude, faith and blessings,

Rev. Lara Cowtan

May 8, 2025

## **Facilities**

Our Facilities team experienced leadership transition in the 2024-2025 church year as Reed Richards began his work as Facilities Manager December 18, 2024. Teresa Connor came out of retirement for three months as Interim Facilities Manager to bridge the gap after Robert Baker's departure and to provide training for Reed.

Our facilities staff continued to provide a level of care and hospitality that earns them the admiration and appreciation of members, friends, and visitors alike. Facilities specialists instrumental to that care in the 2024-2025 church year: Sherifatu Akibu, Lillian Birkholz, Marcos Del Angel, Sara Feinberg, Sani Shaibu, and Mo Todd.

Building use by tenants and community groups continued to grow in 2024-2025 as groups were increasingly eager to meet in person. Our ability to professionally accommodate hybrid meetings (held both in-person and online) also makes us an attractive rental space. Our building is open and in use almost continuously, often from 8am to 9pm.

We are moving forward with many capital projects and building improvements that we put on hold during the multiple staff transitions in the 2023-2024 church year. We:

- Installed new carpet in the Foote and Center Rooms.
- Set up an Archives Room in the lower level, complete with carpet and storage.
- Purchased a moveable media cart for hybrid meetings and other viewing, primarily in the Robbins Parlor but moveable to other spaces as well.

This coming summer and fall we expect to:

- Add pavers under the tent and build an accessible path into the green space.
- Install the Szekely gate in the green space, built in honor of Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs ministry by our partner church in Romania.
- Repair the vandalized "We Dare Not Fence the Spirit" sculpture on the church's south wall.
- Turn over our fluorescent lighting throughout the church to LEDs, saving significant energy and responding to the phase-out of fluorescent bulbs.
- Re-do our boiler venting to prevent future leaks.

## **Gardening**

A special thank you to our Unity Garden Team, led by Sharon Merritt. These dedicated volunteers gathered most Thursdays from spring to fall to plant, tend and care for the incredibly beautiful gardens and grounds around the church. Such a gift to our church community and to our neighborhood!

## **Building Tenants and Community Groups**

One Voice Mixed Chorus and Border CrosSing Minnesota maintain their offices at Unity Church. We continued to have core tenants such as Medley Village Preschool, the New Century Club, Mind Stretch, the Minnesota Hungarians, Transforming Families, and a number of recovery programs. We also provided space for Red Cross blood drives and serve as a polling site.

## **Membership**

In February 2025, Unity Church certified 812 voting members with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

From July 1, 2024 – May 1, 2025, Unity welcomed 20 new and returning members and their families. Finding Yourself at Unity continued as a year-round, drop-in weekly Sunday class, led by congregant facilitators with staff information presenters.

These are the people who joined Unity Church July 1, 2024, through May 1, 2025:

1. Jeffrey Adams
2. Sarah Adams
3. Kathryn Bartee
4. Barbara Benner
5. Anne Caswell
6. Lessie Culmer-Nier
7. John Dunlop
8. Jerry Grunstad
9. Joan Johnson
10. Daniel Kodet
11. Chris Kwong
12. Mallory LaSonde
13. Andrea Martin
14. Presley Martin
15. Don Pinkham
16. Glenda Pinkham
17. Kai Rocke
18. Shahzore Shah
19. Jeff Vandercook
20. Terri Vandercook

## **Adult Religious Education and Programming**

Submitted by Philippa Anastos, Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant

Adult religious education opportunities at Unity Church continued to span a wide range, from introductory and one-time offerings to more in-depth commitments. These offerings touch on many different areas of the Double Helix Model, encouraging participants to develop spiritual practices, engage more deeply with themselves and their community, and give back to the world in a meaningful way.

Now in its eighth year, the Chalice Circle program engaged 63 participants across eight groups. Each group met monthly with a trained facilitator, and discussed the month's worship theme, this year largely exploring paired concepts, such as Ritual and Spontaneity, that were neither entirely congruent nor fully at odds. This look into the worship theme was supported by a team of gleaners, who gathered art, spiritual practices, reading recommendations, and more into a monthly packet. Chalice Circles are attended by community members across very different demographics, with both long-term and new members strongly represented.

Also in its eighth year, the ten-month UU Wellspring program engaged 16 participants in twice monthly spiritual deepening rooted in the sources of our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition, led by two trained facilitators. Several participants have been recommended as Teaching Associates, Worship Associates, and Chalice Circle facilitators.

The Teaching Associates program entered its sixth year, with a new cohort beginning its journey to serve as lay resident theologians, equipped to support the collective faith life of the congregation. A second cohort continued to complete their third year of programming, meeting monthly for minister-led education and practice, and to graduate and serve as one among 25 Teaching Associates who have now completed this program.

Sangha practice continued to meet every Tuesday afternoon in Ames Chapel, with a dedicated group of 15-20 practicing meditation and engaged in this year's dharma study focused on right speech, right action, and right livelihood. In this weekly practice of meditation, open to anyone interested, participants discover a clarity of mind attentive and accountable to each moment of life's flow and touch the mystery of our original face.

Offering shorter programs for spiritual growth, Wellspring Wednesday at Unity Church gathered a multigenerational church community to nourish right and holy relationship among us and deepen our life of faith grounded in spiritual practice and antiracist multicultural work. The Wellspring Wednesday experience includes:

- Sharing meaningful time and nourishing food together
- Brief multigenerational worship in Ames Chapel
- Opportunities to play, learn, and practice with one another

Wellspring Wednesday programs focused on spiritual practice, antiracist multicultural practice, and the intersection between them as expressed in our Double Helix metaphor. Spiritual practice programs included:

- Lectio Divina twice a month
- A monthly hymn sing
- Somatic Yoga
- A Lenten series focused on exploring different spiritual practices, led by all three ministers
- Considering Five Theological Questions for adults to go through the five major questions of Coming of Age
- The Dying for Beginners series, and Death Café, both of which saw strong attendance
- Demonstrations by featured artists, teaching art as a spiritual practice

The antiracism emphasis included the bi-monthly Antiracism Literacy Partners program, pairing participants up to discuss books, articles, films, podcasts and other resources and find what actions these resources call them to take, plus one-time programs on:

- Bridging political divides
- The American Indian Recovery Act
- The Doctrine of Discovery
- Mitakuye Oyasin: Poems and Words from a Dakota Poet's Journey
- A presentation by Dakota elder Dr. Chris Mato Nunpa on his book *The Great Evil—Christianity, the Bible and Native American Genocide*
- The Process and Politics of Reparations in St. Paul
- Planetary Health: Envisioning Our Future with New and Ancient Eyes

Deep appreciation goes out to the many Unity Church teams, including Community Outreach Ministry, Library Bookstall, Beloved Community Staff, and Art teams, and other members who help make this rich and diverse learning possible.

## Ministry with Children and Families

### Reflections and Highlights

Submitted by Rev. K.P. Hong, Minister of Faith Formation

Where individualism dominates, our longing to connect and touch personhood only grows stronger. If *individualism* says we are primarily our interests, *persons* are defined by relationships. We touch personhood not through instrumental means or tasks in pursuit of interests but through the fact of being bound to one another. “Sister” and “friend” and “parent” are designations given to persons, while the individual is an accountant or medical professional or school administrator or groundskeeper denoting functions shaped by interest. Yes, of course, persons do things and perform tasks, but it's difficult to say what a parent does. What *doesn't* a parent do? They are a parent not in any delimited function but in giving themselves entirely to those whom they are bound in relationship. Any instrumentalization or reduction of relationship to some laundry list of functions is to diminish and withhold personhood from one another. In truth, we are all lonely for one another, lonely to embrace the personhood of the other who gives us the gift of our own sacred, immeasurable being.

Our children are unrelenting, unapologetic reminders that their personhood is constituted by relationship, drawn to others who are willing to share themselves openly and risk making their own personhood available. As spiritual guides of children, our volunteer teachers often find themselves receiving far more than they give. This is *relational learning* in which we nest our children in covenant, and in that sharing of personhood, touch the sacred and holy. For that purpose:

- The Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) brought focus to nurture and expand opportunities for multigenerational ministry. We know that congregations that gather as a single multigenerational body (mixing) do not have the whole picture; neither does the swing in the other direction of gathering by age cohorts (huddling), leaving children and youth with little connection to the larger church. So, acknowledging that both mixing and huddling play necessary roles in faith formation, how do we shape a more meaningful and vibrant multigenerational ministry? From chapel services at Wellspring Wednesday to setting aside space for children during Parish Hall fellowship time on Sundays, cultivating multigenerational opportunities continues.
- One multigenerational initiative proved particularly valuable and will continue forth as an ongoing program. “Intergenerational Choir Friends” paired members of the children’s choir with members of the adult choir, providing an opportunity to exchange messages of friendship and encouragement on their singing Sundays.
- Fellowship opportunities and fostering connections among RE families remained a priority, including Dine with Nine and chance for families with young children to meet for conversations about parenting as spiritual practice. Mealtime and bedtime rituals, developed by the UU Families Initiative, resumed as another gathering for the growing number of families with younger children.
- Expanding the repertoire of “intensives” for faith formation continued as a generative focus. From the Youth Musical and the Coming of Age retreat, to the Boston Pilgrimage and YouthCon gatherings with partner congregations, intensives offered a focused,

immersive experience for youth to engage more deeply with their faith journey. What other intensives can we imagine across the array of RE programming? Could we pilot in the coming year a meal-fellowship for RE families following the second service on Sundays?

- New middle school curriculum was developed to bring focus to “The Interconnected Web” and the pressing challenges of climate change and environmental justice, helping our youth to explore what it means to be in right relationship with the animate earth.

Throughout these initiatives and pilot projects over the year, “teaching as spiritual practice” anchored the relational practices and the revelation of personhood in vulnerability, connection, and a form of love truer than the simplistic alternative between the conditional and the unconditional—a covenantal love.

**Ministerial Intern**

Unity Church values its role as a teaching congregation for future UU ministers. During the Eller-Isaacs's tenure, Unity had one, and sometimes two, ministerial interns each year. Each intern was supervised by Revs. Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs, and each has had a ministerial intern support team made up of members of the church.

In the last year of the Eller-Isaacs's ministry (2020-2021), and in the following three years of interim ministry, we did not have interns.

This year, we explored restarting the Hallman Ministerial Internship program, named for Unity Church member Rev. Laurel Hallman. We have formed a support team and hired an intern, Amy Brunell, who will start in August 2025, and serve through the coming congregational year.

## Music Ministries

Submitted by Ahmed Anzaldúa, Minister of Faith Formation

The period from July 2024 to May 2025 has been one of deepening engagement and continued growth for the Music Ministries at Unity Church. In a year marked by both national uncertainty and the ongoing evolution of our congregational life, music has remained a steady and nurturing force—holding space for grief, joy, tradition, and transformation. The choirs have continued to grow, both in number and in musical ambition, and our worship music continues to reflect an increasingly diverse and vibrant community.

The following are highlights of the past year:

- All of Unity’s choirs have grown stronger this year, with Unity Choir in particular welcoming an influx of new members, including several young adults. The Youth Choir has had a successful year, collaborating with the Women’s Ensemble in powerful multigenerational worship offerings all spring.
- The Music Ministry played a crucial role in holding the congregation during the emotional and spiritual turbulence surrounding the 2024 election and the presidential inauguration in January.
- Multiple memorial services for beloved elders of Unity Church were held during this period, where music served as a deeply healing and connective presence. Several of these services included a choral offering, since they honored people with deep ties to the Music Ministry at Unity Church.
- December brought a series of beloved traditions, including the holiday concert, Christmas pageants, Carol Shout, and Christmas services.
- The Unity Singers led the music of the Tolling of the Bells service, continuing a moving annual tradition.
- The Unity House Band has become a well-established and consistent presence in services, appearing at least once a month. Their collaborations with the choirs and guest musicians such as Peter Mayer have become highlights throughout the year.
- The biggest project of the spring was the Unity Singers performing on stage at The Ordway with Border CrosSing, presenting Osvaldo Golijov’s Oceana. This performance was a major milestone, a testament to the ensemble’s growth, and stretched them to their limit. It was extraordinarily successful and led to increased interest in our community in the Music Ministry at our church.
- All choirs took on an extraordinarily diverse and musically demanding repertoire this year. The Women’s Ensemble in particular tackled pieces of exceptional difficulty given their size and rehearsal time, achieving remarkable results.
- Palm Sunday and Easter services featured especially large and meaningful musical offerings, enriching the spiritual experience of the season.
- Our musical partnerships continue to thrive. OneVoice Mixed Chorus and Mila Vocal Ensemble were featured in services throughout the year. We’ve hosted a local viol consort in our building for rehearsals, who then participated in Foote Music Sunday. Our

relationship with Walker West Music Academy continues to deepen as they use our building for their programming.

- The monthly hymn singing and discussion group has now found a permanent home as a regular Wellspring Wednesday offering.
- The Threshold Choir continues to be active and independently organized, providing musical comfort at bedsides in times of transition.
- Beloved Unity musical traditions such as the Christmas Candlelight Choir, Foote Music Sunday, the Winter Concert and dessert buffet, the Youth Musical, the Carol Shout, and Peter Mayer's appearance at Merging of the Waters were especially joyful and well-attended this year.

## **Unity Consulting**

Unity Consulting is a program of Unity Church whose mission is to liberate and empower the leadership of progressive religious congregations and institutions to awaken compassion, transform lives, and bless the world. We help congregations understand their purpose, the difference they make in people's lives, and then we help them organize to deliver on that promise. Our primary tool is Policy Governance® as we've learned to adapt it for congregations.

Ten percent of Unity Consulting's fees go to support Unity Church's operating budget. Unity Consulting also provides some pro-bono services to the denomination through governance consulting with denominational and congregational leaders.

Highlights from this past year's work include:

- Provided consulting services, retreats and hourly coaching, to three congregations over the course of the year (July 2024-April 2025), far fewer than previous years as Laura Park moved to her new full-time positions at the church.
- Unity Church benefited from the expansion of Unity Consulting methods to other consultants, as it hired someone trained in the Unity Consulting approach to guide its recent ends renewal.
- Continued sales of *The Nested Bowls: The Promise and Practice of Good Governance*. InSpirit, the UUA Bookstore, carries the book and it is also available on Amazon. Sales have been small but steady.
- \$1,055 went to the Unity Church operating budget from Unity Consulting and Spirit Map fees and book royalties July 2024 through April 2025.

## **Welcome Teams**

Welcome Team members worked at the intersection of hospitality ministry and the multicultural ends of the church. Welcome team members tend to volunteer in multiple ways, and this year has seen a rotation with some team members moving on to focus on new areas within the church, while some new and established members of the community have reached out to come onto the team! Full team training deepened their capacity for their mission of nurturing mutual belonging and connected them with the emergency action plan and their responsibilities in it. Additional team training is planned around the welcome of those with identities that are often "othered," accommodations of disability, and welcome as a spiritual practice. Sunday team meetings with team practice grounded members for their ministry of welcome across difference

## Worship Life

Submitted by Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Senior Minister

Unity Church's worship services follow monthly themes, shared with the chalice circles and spiritual practice packets developed and printed monthly. This year, I (Rev. Sinclair) chose the themes to highlight frequent areas of creative tension in my own theology and preaching, as a way to introduce myself to the congregation more fully than the weeklong candidating process in 2024. The themes from the previous year included:

Month	Theme
September 2024	Welcome and Belonging
October	Change and Tradition
November	Grace and Liberation
December	Hope and Fear
January 2025	Resolution and Improvisation
February	Truth and Lies
March	Courtesy and Courage
April	Practice and Inspiration
May	Ritual and Spontaneity
June	Where's the Fun in That? (Joy)

We deliberately, in the first year of a new ministry, made very few changes to the liturgy of worship or annual services. All the "usual" rituals of Unity Church continued, including story and family Sundays, Merging of the Waters, Christmas Eve services and the Christmas pageant, the Tolling of the Bells, Coming of Age, and the Flower Celebration. Most months Rev. Lara Cowtan, Unity Church's Minister of Congregational Care, preached once. Rev. KP Hong, Unity Church's Minister of Faith Formation, preached at our annual Coming of Age Sunday morning service. Guest preachers included Rev. Mary Katharine Morne, President of the UU Service Committee; Rev. Meg Riley, UUA Moderator; Worship Associate Ari Giles, and Rev. Jessica Clay. Rev. Clay preached at the Installation service held on Saturday, April 12.

Unity Church has a strong tradition of lay leadership in worship. The Worship Associates program was a signature of Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Issacs in Oakland, and they brought the program to Unity, where it is now well-established. In addition to working on individual services, Unity Church's Worship Associates gather quarterly to discuss the state of the church and its worship life. This year those meetings focused on understanding Unity Church's liturgy: why we do things the way we do, in the order we do them.

Worship is a communal art form; it exists in the ongoing conversation between preacher, congregation, and the beyond. It is a category error to think of what happens on Sunday morning as the product of any single author. Even with that understanding, the culture of collaboration in worship at Unity has been a source of surprise and joy this year. Each month

begins with a theme team meeting, where a group of staff and members gather to talk through the theme for the upcoming month, sharing resources and bouncing ideas off each other. Most services are developed in conversation between lay worship associates, ministers, and Unity Church's Director of Music Ministries, Ahmed Anzaldúa. Halfway through the year, my (Oscar's) spouse remarked that I "stepped up my game" preaching this year. If there is any truth to that, the credit goes to the worship team that co-creates Sunday every week. It is easy to want to bring your best work when you know everyone around you is doing the same.

**Worship Associates:**

Sara Ford (Chair),\* Betsy Hearn (Vice-Chair), Meg Arnosti, Richard Buggs\*\*, Charlie Caswell, Sarah Cledwyn\*\*, Veronica Nordeng DeVillez\*\*, Isaac Fried, Ari Giles,\* Peggy Lin,\* Anna Newton, Chris Russert, Ollie Stocker\*\*, Lorelee Wederstrom.\*

\*Outgoing

\*\*Joined April 2025

**Theme Team:**

Rev. Andrea Anastos, Dr. Ahmed Anzaldúa, Rev. Lara Cowtan, Drew Danielson, Rev. Tom Duke, Rev. Karen Hering, Rev. KP Hong, Nelson Moroukian, Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair