



Unity Church – Unitarian Annual Report: July 2022-June 2023 Table of Contents

Access the annual report online
<https://bit.ly/ucureport2223>

Board of Trustees and Staff List	1-2
In Memoriam	3
Introduction to 2022-2023 Annual Report	4-5
Executive Team Interpretation of Ends	6-12
Monitoring Report – Policy J.....	13-15
Board of Trustees: Year in Review	16-18
Interim Minister Report	19-23
Congregational Survey	24
Administration	25
Archives Team.....	26
Art Team.....	27-28
Beloved Community Staff Team	29-30
Community Outreach.....	31-32
Denominational Affairs.....	33
Facilities.....	34-35
Literary Ministries	36
Membership.....	37-39
Music Ministry	40-42
Ministry with Children and Families	43-44
Ministerial Intern	45
Pastoral Care	46
Sanctuary Congregation	47
Unity Consulting.....	48
Worship Life	49-50
Finance and Resource Development	51-54

Attachments

Finance Attachments Request a printed copy or see links on page 54

Unity Church-Unitarian

Sanctuary Address: 733 Portland Avenue

Business Address: 732 Holly Avenue

Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104

651-228-1456 • 651-228-0927 (fax)

unity@unityunitarian.org • www.unityunitarian.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Mary Baremore

Debbie Cushman

Clover Earl

Kevin Ely

Kevin Harris

Mary Hernandez

Jess Landgraf

Louise Livesay-Al, Chair

LauraSue Schlatter

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Rev. K.P. Hong

Barbara Hubbard

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

Minister of Faith Formation

Executive Director

Interim Senior Minister

CHURCH STAFF

Program Staff

Ahmed Anzaldúa

Drew Danielson

Mark Dietrich

Rev. Karen Gustafson

Ray Hommeyer

Kathleen Kraulik

Rev. Shaylynn MacKay

Katrina Nichols

Laura Park

Laura Potratz

Kathleen Radspinner

Shahzore Shah

Madeline Summers

KrisAnne Weiss

Director of Music Ministries

Coordinator of Youth and Campus Ministries

Unity Choir Bass Section Leader

Associate Minister

Youth Ministry & Nursery Supervisor

Choir Accompanist

Coordinator of Community Outreach Ministries

Nursery Coordinator

Director of Membership and Hospitality

Organist & Youth Music Coordinator

Children's Choir Director

Unity Choir Tenor Section Leader

Hospitality Coordinator & Program Assistant

Unity Choir Alto Section Leader

Administrative/Facilities Staff

Heidi Birkholz

Olendta Bryant

Tameishey Brown

Teresa Connor

Dion Jones

Parker Lin

Claire Newhouse

Emma Mathews-Lingen

Sani Shaibu

Facilities Maintenance Coordinator

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Operations Coordinator

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Specialist

Facilities Specialist

Song Thao
Martha Tilton

Financial Assistant
Director of Communications

MINISTER EMERITA / EMERITUS

Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs

Minister Emerita

STAFF EMERITA

Ruth Palmer

Director of Music Ministries Emerita

In Memoriam

Gene Bard

December 29, 1935–October 18, 2023

Jean Phillips Baker

December 6, 1925–September 20, 2023

Kenneth Elwin Ford

January 14, 1940–September 8, 2023

Jane Evans

November 20, 1943–August 2023

Jacqueline Mae (Kniefel) Lind

March 9, 1947–August 29, 2023

Iris Helen Cornelius

May 17, 1947–June 1, 2023

Ila Jean Velleu

April 15, 1930–May 8, 2023

Robert Edward Steller

March 2, 1936–April 30, 2023

Warren Bruce Misiewicz

October 12, 1941–March 26, 2023

Rita Flood

August 28, 1924–March 20, 2023

Barbara Taylor

February 13, 1938–January 20, 2023

Judith Fuller

September 28, 1933–December 31, 2022

Sylvia Elrod

November 23, 1938–December 28, 2022

Judith Bavis Steller

June 10, 1936–December 12, 2022

Introduction to the 2022-2023 Annual Report

In the unraveling of deep connections everywhere around us—of institutions and communities and narratives that once tightly wove our collective lives, of the autonomous self and rugged individualism that persists in shaping the American myth out of tune with the crises facing an interdependent world—for whom and on whose behalf does the church move and have its being? While the priests of individualization and privatization in white dominant culture proclaim a gospel of ownership and possession of self and property aligned with the demands of 21st century “ownership culture,” our church governance policy posits a radically differing form of ownership:

“The Moral Owners of Unity Church-Unitarian are members of Unity Church-Unitarian and others who yearn for the Beloved Community and see Unity Church-Unitarian as an instrument for its realization. The Beloved Community is engaged in the work of the spirit. It is community at the highest level of reality and possibility, where love and justice prevail.”
(Governing Policies, Policy D: Moral Ownership)

Amid dramatic and compounded changes about us, and the church moving through many changes of an interim process, for whom and on whose behalf does the church move and have its being? Moral ownership makes a profound claim of responsibility and accountability different from that of customers or beneficiaries or even stakeholders, a claim rooted in covenantal relations that clarify the discourse, values, and the future we create through our congregational *Ends*. Moral ownership calibrates *who* and *what* and *how* we listen as a faith community amid the many voices clamoring for our attention and prioritization. Moral ownership presses toward moral efficacy—our ability to organize and mobilize human and material resources to carry out our promises—and moral courage to face complexities and “rise above heartbreak to carry on the work of ending oppression in all its forms.”

From the start of the church year with memorial service for Minister Emeritus Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs and the heartbreaking diagnosis of Minister Emerita Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs, we gathered to hold each other in our grief and loss. We gathered to rise to the challenges of deepening our covenantal bonds following a conflicted ministerial search without a final called senior minister. We engaged the tasks of Interim Ministry with Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, while the board began its extensive work in reviewing bylaws and clarifying the search process. We met for congregational life review sessions and to explore a deeper covenant of right relations. We received the UUA’s new compensation guidelines and wrestled with inequity and compensation discrepancies among staff, all within a yearlong analysis of staffing needs to sustainably undergird the ministry of the church. And by March 2023, with the support and counsel of the Mid-America region staff and the church’s executive team, the board decided to move forward with a search to have a new senior minister welcomed in August 2024. Nominations for the Ministerial Search Team (MST) were received, and in May, the congregation voted and installed its new MST, with a charge both to the search team and a charge to the congregation on the expectations of how we as a faith community will move forward in right relations with one another.

Moral ownership of the church is not easily defined or applied, and moral owners are not always easily identifiable. But such quality of being, mutual belonging, and moral character bears witness to a moral and spiritual ownership sifted and clarified through the interim process, our pursuit of a covenantal relations, and recounted each time we claim that “there are no other people’s children.” What the interim year clarified and strengthened is the life, vitality, and *raison d’être* of the church realized again and again by moral owners “engaged in the work of the spirit,” members of a “community at the highest level of reality and possibility, where love and justice prevail.” This report highlights some of the many and generous ways ministers, staff, and volunteers provided worship, programming, inspiration, generous care, and strength in shared ministry. How we embody and realize such moral ownership will continue to be worked in the details of our shared ministry, of how we nurture the conditions that make possible the prophetic imaginary we know as Beloved Community.

The Unity Church Executive Team

Rev. K.P. Hong, Minister of Faith Formation
Barbara Hubbard, Executive Director
Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, Interim Senior Minister

Executive Team Interpretation of the 2019-2023 Ends with Strategic Priorities for 2022-2023

Written in August 2022

Overarching

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

Note: One of the interim tasks is considering our identity and articulating what “we the people” means to us, even as we the people undertake five core tasks of interim ministry:

- *Examine history*
- *Examine identity*
- *Leadership development and change*
- *Renewing congregational ties (Strengthening denominational connections)*
- *Preparing for the future or committing to new directions in ministry*

We will do that interim work before we offer an interpretation of this overarching phrase.

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 complexity of 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 stay engaged despite discomfort and inevitable failures.

Strategic Priorities:

In close consultation with Team Dynamics, we will:

1. Promote and curate an expanding multicultural experience of worship, particularly in our music ministries, focusing on the *Minimization Orientation’s* developmental task of deepening cultural self-awareness as necessary groundwork for recognizing and appreciating wider cultural differences. As we look toward the change that comes in interim work and ministerial transition, we will incorporate new elements into the worship service while attending to the need for constancy. We will help the

congregation more clearly identify what we mean by a meaningful worship service and what we mean by a meaningful multicultural worship experience.

2. Deepen IDI work for Community Outreach Ministry Teams and others who have taken the instrument to make further progress on their IDPs.
 3. Evaluate and implement new Religious Education (RE) curricula that situates our Unitarian Universalist faith within a multicultural framework. Continue curriculum review across all RE programs, with next focus on Year 2 of Rotation curricula with a racial justice and multicultural lens as guide.
 4. Strengthen chalice circles and small group ministry with a deeper emphasis on cultural self-awareness as necessary work in building authentic relationships.
 5. Coordinate Year 3 contractual resources with Team Dynamics, building on areas where coaching, facilitating, and training remain both critical and effective, including:
 - a. Shaping how we think about values, finances, and reparations (see end #8).
 - b. Translating the individual practices of antiracist multiculturalism toward what an antiracist multicultural congregation as an institution looks, sounds, and feels like.
 - c. Helping us build institutional practices that create brave space for prophetic ministry that dismantles dominant culture (see end #7).
 6. Recognizing the importance of holy relationship and proximity to people of color:
 - a. Clarify the institutional relationship with communities of color that align with the church
 - b. Support the efforts of the Ministerial Search Team (if formed) to link with members and friends of color within Unity Church
 - c. Support the efforts of the Board of Trustees to link with moral owners in communities of color beyond the church.
 7. Incorporate the DNA double-helix map interweaving faith formation and antiracist multiculturalism throughout the ministries of the church.
 8. Investigate the intersection of gender and faith in the congregation, supporting and strengthening the work of gender identity as part of the multicultural work of the church.
- 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. Individual spiritual practice and communal worship are essential expectations of church involvement. Consistent practice expands our capacity for wonder and fosters spiritual development. When we 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.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Explore the qualities of worship that grow our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening, as part of a process of regular review and discernment of the worship experience.
 2. Structure faith formation as an overarching priority across existing programs and emerging initiatives, facilitating lifespan faith formation and intergenerational opportunities.
 - a. Structure Wellspring Wednesdays into greater alignment with faith formation, increasingly shaping an intergenerational worship service, with involvement from youth and families.
 - b. Review and winnow the wide array of WW programming typically offered, while exploring creative initiatives towards adult faith formation.
 3. Ground newcomers quickly in the art and expectation of spiritual practice and develop a process by which they can grow in this practice as they move from membership to discipleship.
- 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 stated principles as tools 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.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Determine the connection between membership and the capacity to articulate Unitarian Universalist faith identity.
 2. Sustain the Teaching Associates program with special attention to deploying associates who will integrate spiritual-theological reflection and attend to faith formation across strategic ministry areas.
 3. Strengthen growing opportunities for intergenerational faith formation within existing RE structures and practices, including strengthening parental involvement in seminal programs from Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age to the Boston pilgrimage and Tower Club parent council.
 4. Engage the History Teaching Team to further the interim work to understand our history and identity.
 5. Renew the connection between Unitarian Universalist faith and courageous action of the Community Outreach Ministry Teams in the world through the ongoing renewal process.
- 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 helps us align ourselves toward the good, welcoming both gifts and wounds across a diversity of human experience. We claim a faith that breaks past fear and leads toward Beloved Community.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Create opportunities to talk about issues of history and identity arising from the congregation being in transition.
2. Provide opportunities for group lament and confession.
3. Provide opportunities for the congregation to transform its relationship with conflict and engage in rituals of reconciliation.

4. Lift up the importance of radical hospitality and increase our capacity to nurture mutual belonging. In particular, we will continue the work with the Welcome Teams to cultivate radical hospitality and their understanding of and commitment to this work.
 5. Explore the best use of technology to know each other in all our fullness.
 6. Explore the meaning and purpose of gendered retreats in deepening relationships in congregational life.
 7. Deepen our understanding and practice of covenantal theology in the midst of difference.
5. **Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow and transition.**

Interpretation:

Our pastoral ministry reflects a growing understanding of relational ministry rooted in covenantal theology and its ability to transform lives. We accompany one another during threshold moments and times of transition. We are eager to be present in joyful times and able to stay present in the face of suffering. The Holy reveals itself in a tangible way in our mutual care for one another.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Deepen our understanding and practice of covenantal theology in pastoral ministry.
 2. Build capacity for the congregation to stay present in the face of systemic grief, loss, and suffering.
 3. Create opportunities to animate the inherent joy that's in the congregation as an embodiment of Beloved Community.
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 a personal and collective commitment to justice, equity and healing. We invite the power of this commitment, deepened by our spiritual practices, to change our hearts and

lives and to help us discern what to let go of 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.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Determine staffing to support our community outreach ministries and what it means to right-size those ministries.
2. Continue the renewal process in our Community Outreach Ministry Teams which will further develop their capacity to engage the double helix connecting faith formation and justice work.

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

Interpretation:

As an expression of covenant, 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 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*

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

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Build the staff and congregation's capacity to recognize the characteristics of white dominant culture and engage their antidotes in their interactions with one another.
2. Explore questions of authority and authority structures in relation to dismantling dominant culture:
 - a. What is the place and shape of authority in authentic shared ministry?
 - b. What do we mean about the practices of consensus building?
 - c. What are our sources of authority and how do we use them?
 - d. What is our relationship with authority in tension with covenant?

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.

Strategic Priorities:

We will:

1. Develop a transition plan for the Executive Director's upcoming retirement:
 - a. Clarify and strengthen the financial management structure and staffing.
 - b. Equip and empower a lay Development Ministry Team to advise the Executive Director on how the assets of the church can boldly and courageously express the church's core values and its antiracist, multicultural ends.
2. Prepare a comprehensive staffing plan, with attention to our antiracist multicultural work and commitments. This includes work to explore and clarify staff compensation and benefits in light of NACBA, UUA recommended guidelines, and the UUA's upcoming salary survey results.
3. Support the board's work to deepen its trustee nomination process, board wholeness, discipleship, linkage, and reparations.
4. Use the interim process to clarify our relationship with the larger UU movement, including participation in General Assembly and Regional Assembly, engagement with Statements of Conscience, and consideration of the 8th Principle.

Monitoring Report
Policy J: Anti-Racism and Racial Healing Commitment

The Executive Team shall not take actions or otherwise conduct the affairs of Unity Church-Unitarian in any manner that does not comport with its commitment to becoming an actively antiracist institution. The Executive Team shall not:

1. Engage vendors in an amount greater than \$2,500 annually without assessing and educating any such vendor using a matrix of values which includes, but is not limited to antiracism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism and class inclusion.

The ET’s response to this limitation has been to:

1. *Develop and implement a matrix of criteria that expresses the church’s stated values and ends.*
2. *Survey current contractors and vendors to evaluate their compliance with our criteria.*
3. *Create required goals for our current vendors and contractors who are not in compliance, thus challenging and educating them;*
4. *Apply the criteria to all future processes for the selection of contracted services and vendors.*
5. *Report results to the Board of Trustees and the congregation annually in an effort to be accountable and transparent.*

We have developed criteria (see below) but we have not surveyed current contractors as proposed. We do, however, apply these values and criteria with new contracts that are above \$2,500.00.

Matrix of Criteria for contracts and vendors (weighted):
1. Minority hiring practices - resulting in a 31%* employment of people of color and women. (25%)
2. Sustainability practices – demonstration of a commitment to healing the earth. (15%)
3. Local engagement – demonstration of a commitment to the community’s overall health and well-being. (15%)
4. Worker’s Equity in fair compensation, inclusive benefits and healthy work environment. (20%)
5. Competitive fees for goods and services (25%)
*Keyed to Ramsey County requirements.

2. Allow the board to be uninformed about diversity of staff on payroll, including the percentage of positions and salary paid to people of color.

As of September 2022 our staff is comprised of 35.3% people of color (6 of 17), and 25.2% of salaries were assigned to people of color (\$226,190 of \$898,544).

3. Allow staff members to be uninformed about how to conduct their duties in alignment with the antiracism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism and class inclusion values of Unity Church-Unitarian.

In 2016, the Beloved Community Staff Team was formed at Unity Church to strengthen and coordinate Unity's antiracist and multicultural work, and to share the stories of this journey with the wider community. The BCST has members from executive leadership, program staff and the laity.

In conjunction with Team Dynamics, we offered opportunities for staff members to participate in trainings and series. Some, but not all staff have completed the IDI, participated in the group feedback session with a qualified administrator, have had an individual session, and have created an Intercultural Development Plan.

We recognize that new learnings and growth call us to develop new ways of integrating our learnings into our staff dynamics and the church culture. We are taking steps to create venues for this integration.

4. Interpret the ends statements without consideration of the antiracism commitment of Unity Church-Unitarian and how that commitment is implemented in covenant with local communities of color.

As you can see from the ET's Interpretation of the Ends and Strategic Priorities for the 2023-2024 church year, our commitment to antiracism is woven throughout the ministries and programs of the church.

5. Allow the congregation to be uninformed about the work being done to live out the anti-racism, anti-oppression, multicultural and class inclusive values of Unity Church-Unitarian, and the measurable outcomes of that work, including the percentage of Sunday offerings that go to organizations with an antiracist agenda and/or that serve communities of color.

The Beloved Community Staff Team has a communications team that reports on the work being done to live out the values of the church in the area. Our annual report to the congregation in November includes a summary report.

From July of 2022 through June of 2023, 86% of the organizations that received a Sunday offering serve communities of color and 38% of the organizations include an explicit commitment to an antiracist agenda in their mission.

Policy J

Offering Recipient Analysis

Church Year	Total	# Serve Comm of Color	%	# With A-R Mission	%
2014-2015	51	37	72.5%	23	45.1%
2015-2016	49	39	79.6%	35	71.4%
2016-2017	47	39	83.0%	24	51.1%
2017-2018	44	32	72.7%	21	47.7%
2018-2019	48	36	75.0%	20	41.7%
2019-2020	46	37	80.4%	22	47.8%
2020-2021	49	45	91.8%	24	49.0%
2021-2022	50	38	76.0%	17	34.0%
2022-2023	50	43	86.0%	19	38.0%

Report from the Board of Trustees

This has been a year of hope and change for the board. While this report is meant to summarize key work over this past year, I want to start by talking about how we do our work each month followed by work initiatives.

A. Board meeting structure. The structure of our meetings changed to include:

1. A reflection at the top of the meeting to set our intentions of what antidote to white supremacy from Team Dynamics we each want to focus on in the meeting and we check in at the end of the meeting about how we feel we met the intentions.
2. State of the congregation report from two trustees and one executive team member, rotating each month.
3. A generative conversation relating to some aspect of church or board life that would help us do our work and decision making with a deeper reflection or understanding of the topic.

This results in about an hour of our meeting helping us be grounded in our work as trustees and practicing the Double Helix in our work.

B. Work of the Board. The board has five committees that work on specific tasks that are brought back to the board as a whole for further discussion and decisions. Here is much of the work of the board as a whole and those five areas of focus.

1. The Board as a whole:

- a. Continued to monitor the executive team in how it is meeting the ends and working within the limitations set by the board in achieving those ends.
- b. Directed the executive team to implement a multi-year plan to bring staff and executive team salaries in line with the UUA's new compensation guidelines.
- c. Decided on next steps for senior minister: In January, after deep reflections and discernment on the Forward Together report last fall and David Pyle's visit in December, the board of trustees decided that Unity was ready to begin a new search process for our next senior minister.
- d. Linked with members, friends and partners of Unity Church.

2. The Transitions committee:

- a. Defined the procedures for the ministerial search team's (MST) work and its relationship to the board and creating a charge to the MST.
- b. Administered the application process and selection of the MST through congregational member voting, finalizing in early May.
- c. Developed a congregational charge in preparation for the search process.
- d. Installed the MST on May 14 and affirmed both the MST and the congregational charges (both charges are available on the Unity website).
- d. Reported to the UUA on our interim ministry.

- e. Worked with the executive team to plan for filling the executive director position in preparation for Barbara Hubbard's retirement. The executive director is part of the executive team and hired by the board. The executive team is also creating a part-time finance manager staff position who will report to the executive director. Stand by for news very soon.
3. The policy and bylaws committee:
- a. Developed bylaw changes based on feedback outlined in the Forward Together presentation:
 - o Art. I, sec. 2 Eligibility to Vote
 - o Art. II, sec. 6 Voting by Absentee Ballot
 - o Art. V, sec. 2 Voting by Absentee Ballot
 - o Art. II, sec. 7 Procedural Rules for Meetings
 - o Art. III, sec. 4 Procedural Rules for Meetings
 - o Art. V, sec. 2 Selection of Called Minister
 - b. Held workshops this fall to talk about the proposed changes and to hear feedback, which has resulted in one modification to the language, changing proxy voting to absentee voting. Thank you to everyone who participated and provided feedback.
4. The evaluation committee:
- a. Coordinated the congregational survey with the MST as one of the tools for monitoring how the executive team is meeting the stated ends.
 - b. Conducted a board self-evaluation to help us examine our work as a board and how we work together and carry out our work.
 - c. Conducted a volunteer and staff survey to assure that the executive team is not violating the limitations set in policies by the board.
5. The communication and education committee:
- a. Implemented the Board Walk & Talk monthly email communication with the members and friends of Unity to share important information relating to board work and the search process.
 - b. Coordinated communications from the board on an ongoing basis.
6. Recruitment Committee:
- a. Implemented changes to how we recruit trustees by inviting Ariana Giles and Kevin Ward to work with the committee to help us re-envision how we do board recruitment in a more transparent and inclusive manner.
 - b. Planned and coordinated on-boarding for the new trustees.

The board believes that all this work, in concert with the members and friends of Unity Church, is imbued with hope and courage about our future. We are a strong and resilient church, willing to do the hard work of examining our culture and practices to determine where we need change. Conflict has become a focus area, recognizing that we have needed to step into conflict and learn to do it with humility, grace and compassion towards one another. We believe in

Unity as a congregation and that by facing conflict and change, we will live into another 150 years of being a saving faith and a strong community for our members, friends and our community.

On behalf of Unity Church-Unitarian Board of Trustees
Louise E Livesay-Al, Chair

Interim Ministry Report

Rev. Kathleen C. Rolenz, Interim Senior Minister
November 2022 – June 2023

The purpose of this report is to document some of the interim work that has been accomplished or is currently in progress during the period of August 2022 – June 2023. This serves as both a documentation for future boards and ministers to read and as a celebration of the good work that Unity Church has done since my arrival in August 2022. Although I am the primary author of this report, I am representing, in part, some of the work of the executive team. Therefore, I'll be referring to myself in the third person.

August 2022. We must begin, however, by going back before the November 2022 annual meeting. Rev. Kathleen Rolenz was hired by the Board of Trustees in June 2022 and began her ministry August 15, 2022. One of her first tasks was to assist the executive team to find a minister of congregational care. After consulting with colleagues and posting a job description, we lured Rev. Karen Gustafson, who lives in Knife River, MN, out of retirement. Rev. Gustafson has served as minister of pastoral care at the UU Congregation of Madison, WI, is a trained interim minister and was available! We welcomed her to the staff in August 2022. Rev. Gustafson's contract was for a year, with the possibility of a second-year renewal.

Rev. Rolenz also met with the executive team members Barbara Hubbard and KP Hong for the team's annual retreat. The purpose of this retreat is to review strategic priorities and to assign various parts of the strategic priorities to members of the executive team, who are accountable to the board of trustees for the fulfillment of those ends. Rev. Karen Gustafson joined us for part of the retreat to orient her to her new role.

September 2022. The first major event of the fall was the memorial service for Minister Emeritus Rev. Rob Eller Isaacs. Rob's memorial was held on September 17, 2022. Colleagues and tributes from all over the country poured in. It was a powerful, heartfelt and memorable tribute to a beloved former minister. At the same time, Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs health took a dramatic and frightening turn, which meant that she could not be physically present for the service. The congregation and church staff had to hold both grief and fear together to rise to the challenges of ministering to this still bruised congregation.

October 2022. Rev. Rolenz outlined for the board and for the congregation the five developmental tasks of interim ministry:

- Exploring a congregation's history
- Articulating a congregation's identity
- Developing new leadership
- Strengthening denominational ties
- Preparing for the future

Of these five, Rev. Rolenz told the congregation she was focusing on primarily history and identity for the first year of interim ministry, while weaving in strengthening denominational

ties. In October Rev. Rolenz offered a series of sermons including, “What Will You Do with Your Second Chance?” on October 2, and “150 Years of Longing” on October 8. Rev. Rolenz also created the interim monitoring team to assist with the interpretation of the goals of interim ministry and to help Rev. Rolenz interpret the needs and culture of the congregation.

November 2022. On November 5, 2022, Rev. Rolenz and the board of trustees offered a joint presentation called Forward Together. The board described their plan for the upcoming two years (bylaws review, clarity about the search process, etc.) She outlined a plan for her interim ministry in the next two years:

What had already been planned or was in process:

1. Weaving themes into sermons and services
2. Groups and gathering on grief and trauma
3. Wellspring Wednesday programs
4. Creating rituals of healing, release, etc.

Upcoming Programs

1. Congregational Life Review (exploring a congregation's historical timeline & important events)
2. Change, Conflict & Complexity workshop with Alfonso Wenker
3. One-on-one conversation between estranged members with trained facilitator and pastoral support
4. Small group conversations - facilitator and pastoral support
5. Congregational study and engagement
6. Explore: congregational covenant
7. Explore: Right Relations team
8. “Transforming Conflict” and participate in workshop offered by Rev. Dr. Teresa Cooley

Also in November, the executive team (Barbara Hubbard, KP Hong and Kathleen Rolenz) embarked upon a yearlong analysis of staffing needs at Unity Church. We met with each staff member, reviewed their job description to determine what modifications, if any, needed to be made. We realized that some staff members' jobs had expanded due to pandemic responsibilities, which they maintained when we returned to in-person. We looked at past trends to determine future ones.

In November, the Unitarian Universalist Association published new compensation guidelines. We compared those guidelines with our current standard (NACBA – National Association of Church Business Administration) and found compensation discrepancies in several staff positions. In addition to creating positions that were more appropriate for how Unity operates *now*, we also needed to propose a salary increase to several positions. The process of analyzing positions, meeting with staff, proposing new positions and salary has consumed much of the team’s time and attention for the 2022-2023 church year. However, we

are proud of the work we've done and believe it has set in motion a strong and healthy staffing structure for the next chapter of Unity's life.

In November, Rev. Rolenz also hosted a gathering to discuss changes to Unity's order of worship, which were further reviewed at the worship associates' retreat in January 2023

December 2022

On the weekend of December 8 – December 11, Rev. David Pyle, Regional Consultant for the Mid-America region, was invited to meet with Rev. Rolenz, with the executive team and to offer two workshops to the congregation as well as preach on Sunday morning. The first workshop was on creating a Covenant of Right Relations or Healthy Relations Team and the second was to provide Unity Church members a chance to understand Rev. Pyles role in the search process and how he, as a member of UUA staff, can be a supportive presence to Unity Church. His assessment of Unity Church was that it was healthier than he expected-- that people seemed to be in a much better place emotionally than earlier in the summer. One of the questions posed to him throughout the weekend was "are we (spiritually) ready to go into search again, or should we postpone?" Rev. Pyle could not answer the second question, but to first, his response was "yes."

This winter was the first one in which Unity Church felt a return to "normal" after having online church since March 2020. The Blue Holidays service, the beloved carol sing/shout, the Christmas concert, Las Posadas, the Christmas pageant, and the traditional Christmas Eve services all returned in person. Attendance was good, but not as robust in years past. On Christmas Day (which was a Sunday this year) a portion of the ceiling in Parish Hall collapsed, necessitating the closure of Parish Hall to repair the ceiling.

January 2023

Tolling of the Bells service was particularly poignant as we remembered former minister emeritus, Rev. Rob Eller Isaacs and many other beloved members who died in 2022. Alfonso Wenker led the Change, Conflict and Complexity workshop as part of the year-long series on those very issues! How do we navigate the complexities that accompany change and conflict with spiritual integrity? These were some of the questions raised and discussed.

Worship associates held their bi-annual retreat in January. At the retreat, we discussed changes that Rev. Rolenz had made to the order of service, such as:

1. Moving congregational news from the beginning of the service to the end,
2. Moving the offering/offertory to after the sermon, and
3. Changing the words to the embracing meditation.

February 2023

Rev. Karen Gustafson brought a wealth of experience to Unity, not the least of which was her work in what's called "life review." Similar to the personal practice of life review, the congregational life review is a process by which a congregational timeline is created, and stories about various epochs of the congregation's history are told. The purpose of this life review is to

explore both a congregation's history and how that history has shaped its current identity. Then, we led the group into an exploration of how their history and identity shapes the ways in which Unity develops its norms, culture, expectations and hopes for their future.

March 2023

By March, the board of trustees had made the decision to open a search for a new senior minister, to be welcomed to Unity Church in August 2024. Nominations for who might serve on the search team were requested. The Executive Team supported the decision to move forward with the search process. Unity Church also held its first-in-a-while fundraiser, March 4, which provided a necessary boost to our operating budget *and* a lot of fun and good dinners, services and programs offered as a result. It felt like a return to the pre-pandemic days.

April 2023

Saturday, April 22, Rev. David Pyle and Rev. Sharon Dittmar of the Mid-America Regional Staff held a workshop on Covenants and Healthy Congregations | Right Relations Teams, which included White Bear, First Universalist and Unity Church. This was an opportunity to understand the purpose of creating a congregational covenant and to dive deeper into the work of a Healthy Congregations and Right Relations Team. It was attended by approximately 60 members.

May 2023

On May 14, the congregation voted on its new ministerial search team. Including in that meeting was a charge to the search team, but also, more importantly, a charge to the congregation, which outlined expectations of how the congregation should conduct itself during this search year. Both charges were crafted by the board of trustees, and set forth clear guidelines on how we, as a congregation, will be in relationship with one another for the 2022-2023 church and search year. The relationship between the board, the executive team and the ministerial search team was clarified.

June 2023

One of the five developmental tasks of interim ministry is “strengthen denominational connections.” Unity Church has had individual members and its senior leadership involved in denominational activities, but a deeper connection with the Unitarian Universalist Association has largely been absent. In an attempt to generate more interest in and involvement with General Assembly, Rev. Rolenz created “watch parties” to enable members to participate in General Assembly virtually. The key events, such as the Service of the Living Tradition, the Ware Lecture and Sunday morning worship were livestreamed at Unity Church. Some were better attended than others. Sunday morning was held in Parish Hall, via livestream, with muffins and coffee served before the service.

After some discernment, Rev. Karen Gustafson decided that she wanted to return to her home and life in Knife River and this time, really retire! However, she agreed to stay through the summer, covering the summer services in July and responding to pastoral care needs as they arose, while Rev. Rolenz was on a long planned for vacation. The executive team advertised for

a minister of congregational care in June. Rev. Lara Cowtan, who was completing a three-year ministry as Interim Senior Minister of the Vancouver Unitarians, applied. The executive team interviewed Rev. Lara and were impressed with her credentials, her work as interim senior minister and her enthusiasm for working and living in Saint Paul and the Mid-West. However, as a Canadian citizen, the executive team and our immigration lawyer needed to secure a work visa for Rev. Lara. We were able to accomplish this in time for her to move to the United States in August 2022.

The Beloved Community Staff Team (BCST) continues to assess the impact of our commitment towards embedding antiracist and anti-oppressive themes, articles, and programs in all aspects of worship life. This is ongoing work.

October began with the news of the attack on Israel by Hamas. As we prayed each week for the cessation of violence, we also realized the growing need for a gathering to mourn and to grieve. On November 1, Rev. Rolenz organized a brief vigil just before Wellspring Wednesday.

From Interim Senior Minister

The famous quote attributed to such diverse sources as Confucius or Mark Twain (!) said: “If you love your job, you never work a day in your life.” While ministry is definitely work – there is always more that can be done than there is time to do it, the benefits of working at Unity Church are enormous. Members are generally kind to their ministers and to their executive team and staff, and to one another. Critiques are fair, praise is generous, gratitude is often shared. Ministering at Unity Church has been – and I fully expect will continue to be – one of the most exciting and fulfilling ministries of my career. It is with deep gratitude that I submit this annual report.

Keeping the faith with you,
Kathleen

Congregational Survey

In order to focus the congregation's attention on the data-gathering the ministerial search team would need to do in the fall, and to focus the board's time on their task of establishing and charging the ministerial search team, the board did not do a congregational survey in spring 2023 as it usually would.

Administration

The 2022-2023 church year was robust for our administrative staff, given that in-person programs and activities resumed after being closed during the pandemic. By the summer of 2022, we were welcoming congregants, tenants and community groups back into the building while adding multi-platform offerings.

Livestreaming our Sunday services, memorials and other events continued in the 2022-2023 church year. Martha Tilton, our livestream executive producer maintained the high quality of our livestream services. You can visit Unity's YouTube channel to watch past and current services. We built a sound technician team for Sanctuary services and events, and we're grateful to Sam Dornfest, Lucas Martin, Lizzie Nelson, Craig Rutherford, Vladimir Garrido and Nico Munoz for their excellent support.

Martha Tilton, in her 16th year as director of communications, continued to manage all things communications with wisdom, skill, creativity and dare I say... patience. We are so grateful.

The administrative staff members in the area of finance and resource development were Barbara Hubbard, executive director and Song Thao, financial assistant. Barbara and Song have been a team, sharing adjoining offices and handling pledges, contributions, payroll, accounts payable and a myriad of other responsibilities for over 25 years. We continued to engage Barb Yanish to provide consulting in the area of finance. The board engaged Schechter, Dokken, Kanter CPA to conduct a review of our 12/31/2022 financial position, which happened in the spring of 2023. (See financial report section.)

Our memorial services in the 2022-2023 church year were supported by 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.

Our paid staff is grateful for the generous support of our dedicated and hard-working front desk volunteers, led by Peter Heege. We are so happy to have welcomed them back as the pandemic lifted. Front desk volunteers in 2022-2023 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.

Archives Team

Since 2013, the archives team has been working through many years' worth of materials - documents, photographs, various media – that record some of the history of Unity's church life. Without adequate space on site to store most of this material, the team has been sorting and inventorying the material in order to transfer it to the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). This material will be added to the existing Unity Church collection at MHS, making it available to any interested party.

This past year, the archives team has been doing some deep digging into what remains in our archives space. They found some small organ pipes, almost certainly from the organ that was in use before the fire. The archives team also found a box of architectural records, and they came across an antique sampler made by a girl, Eunice Tichener, age 11, in 1826. Doing the research on how it got to Unity was very interesting. It was determined that the sampler was given to Unity by Cathy Turner Boykin, but was not made by any of the Turner family members. The art team looked at this piece, and given that it wasn't made by a Unity Church member and needs work, it will not be added to our permanent art collection.

The team is still hoping for a dedicated, secure, climate-controlled space for archives work. It would provide a clean workspace where the team could sort and document materials to be added to the historical society's collection of Unity Church records and also allow for some items and artifacts to remain on site. A space similar to the religious education storage space would be a very workable archives space.

Archive Team members were Louise Merriam, Susan Foote, Carol Miller, Patt Kelly and Pauline Eichten.

Art Team

In 2018, the Unity Church Art Team asked themselves the following questions prompted by the newly adopted ends statements.

- How does art relate to the creation of a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships?
- How does art help people know each other in all their fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people?
- How does art help in the pursuit of justice, wholeness, and equity for the people of the earth and life on it?
- How can art create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture?

If those statements plus the mission to “transformation through a free and inclusive religious community ...” are to be taken seriously at Unity Church, then the art team determined to move forward on them. What shows that movement up to this point?

The art team has heavily recruited artists of greater diverse backgrounds and identities to exhibit at Unity. As a result, the Parish Hall gallery has featured two Indigenous painters, a painter who is a gay refugee from Central America, a group exhibit and Wellspring Wednesday program by Karen weavers, a painter who was a refugee from Afghanistan, three Black painters and collage artists, a group exhibit of mosaic works that included several artists of color, an Asian-American graphic artist and an upcoming Chinese ink painter, a group exhibit by differently abled artists and a Russian immigrant painter.

The art team also set out to expand the permanent art collection that is featured throughout the spaces of Unity Church. New art was added to the collection to further those ends and missions statements. There are now many more artists of color and non-cis gender identity represented. Art from our St. Paul neighbors, the Hmong and Karen cultures, are included.

Mica Lee Anders, a Rondo neighbor and accomplished Black artist and educator, led a group of Unity volunteers to create an eye-catching Foote Room mural inspired by the visual patterns, textiles, and art forms of cultures throughout the world. The shape of the overall design is common to Unitarian Universalists – a chalice. (2022)

In October 2023, the Parish Hall gallery featured a wonderful exhibit of works created by artists incarcerated in the Minnesota correctional facilities for men and women. These talented artists come from varied ethnic groups, cultures and backgrounds and are our neighbors. The organization who brought them here, Art from the Inside, held a successful reception and a fundraiser at Unity. They were also the recipients of a Sunday offering.

In November 2023, the art team hosted a Parish Hall exhibit by Rose and Melvin Smith, esteemed elders in the region's African American artist community. This was the culmination of a journey that began in 2021 when the art team sought them out hoping to purchase one of their art works. After they visited with the art team and toured Unity Church to see the permanent art collection, they agreed to sell one of Rose's fine paintings, an image of a woman who she met in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. That painting now hangs in the Center Room. The Smiths said they were impressed with Unity and wanted to thank our church community for its commitment to promoting the arts. This resulted in the full exhibit of their newest works – never shown anywhere else. Over the years they have exhibited several times in New York City, including a feature show currently in a Manhattan gallery with works depicting scenes and impressions of life in the historic Rondo neighborhood near Unity Church. They have also exhibited in Chicago, Oklahoma, and The Weisman Gallery in Minneapolis. It was a privilege to have them agree to bring new art to Unity. Rose created a series of paintings in the style of *Ikibana*, the Japanese flower arrangement form. Melvin's works were colorful collages inspired by the classical American dance form, the Jitterbug.

There is more to do, more to come from the art team. We hope there is appreciation of this effort.

Beloved Community Staff Team (BCST)

Reflections and Highlights

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

In Pat Parker's poem "For the White Person Who Wants to Know How To Be My Friend," the opening lines unsettle, contend, and jostle with one another and any sense of our complacency: "*The first thing you do is to forget that i'm Black. Second, you must never forget that i'm Black.*" Ambiguities create double meanings, parallel worlds, enlarging and enriching our perception even as they gesture towards complexity, uncertainty, and danger. Ambiguity reminds us that there is always more to be seen than meets the eye, no one simple fix for the history of racism upon which our society and its hierarchies of wealth and power are established. The first things and the second things are not static, all liable to shift in relation to context and relationship. And sometimes, the two distinct meanings and approaches intersect and resonate in the *both/and* state of superposition found in the labor, grace, and complexity of friendship.

In January of 2023, over 70 participants gathered for a program *Change, Conflict, and Complexity: Antidotes and Spiritual Practices* with Alfonso Wenker (Team Dynamics). For more and more of us taking next steps into antiracist practices and expanding intercultural capacities, the increasing complexity of this work is increasingly evident – within, among, and beyond. There is no overlooking, evading, or simplifying this complexity as it is nothing other than the disquieting complexity of ourselves. As James Baldwin insisted, "*Complexity is our only safety and love is the only key to our maturity.*" A love that refuses simplistic definitions and illusions of safety promoted by dominant culture. A love more perceptive to our battling instincts, assumptions, and beliefs that vie for position and power, even weaponizing antiracist tools like "characteristics of white supremacy culture" (Tema Okun) to accuse, shame, blame and perpetuate disconnection. How can we complicate the narrative and keep it from collapsing into that us/them binary? How do we wade into the messiness to achieve conflicts and truer conversations worthy of our humanity? How can we claim a deeper covenant with one another that opens an alternate way into tensions, conflicts, and possibilities? What are the antidotes and spiritual practices needed for this moment in our antiracist multicultural work? And increasingly, along multiple fronts of our antiracist multicultural work, the importance of complicating the narrative and reviving complexity amid false simplicities became axiomatically clear, with examples including:

- The communications team of the BCST shifting from *reporting* to *journalism* that gets beneath events to explore and offer critical commentary and ongoing education to advance our antiracist work.
- The work of reparations and centering the racial wealth gap as we track the work of *The Saint Paul Recovery Act Community Reparations Commission* on repairing racial disparities in generational wealth, homeownership, health care, education, employment and pay, and fairness within the criminal justice system among descendants of chattel slavery.

- Supporting the joint series sponsored by the Indigenous Justice Team and Act for the Earth Team in attending to work issuing from our land acknowledgement and honest storytelling about injustices committed against indigenous tribal nations, the overlapping yet distinct form of reparations for stolen land, sovereignty, and other claims that shape our accountability to healing the history of settler-colonialism’s removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples.
- Building on the Wellspring Wednesday November 2022 four-part series on the Double Helix model that illuminates the mutuality of faith formation and antiracist multicultural work toward a deeper and more integrated life of faith. The growing awareness on the antiracism side of the double helix anticipates future attention given to the spiritual/faith formation side of the double helix.

As we practiced ways to be present to change, engage conflict more creatively, and create brave space where complexity serves as fertile ground for learning and shaping change together, we collaborated with Alfonso Wenker one more time before coming to the conclusion of our multiyear contract with Team Dynamics. We gathered over February/March of 2023 for a four-part “Spiritual Justice Practice Series” exploring complexity framed through *intersectionality*—intersectionality not simply as the *descriptor* of multiple identities that shape our individual lives but *using* and *practicing* intersectionality as a frame for how we engage and understand the greater complexity of justice work, including LGBTQ+ and justice, beyond the white/Black binary, socioeconomic reasons in the social construction of race, and throughout, practicing resistance to oversimplifying the complex.

As we discern next steps in enlarging our prophetic imagination in the work of antiracist multiculturalism, more and more of us are taking further steps into antiracist practices and expanding intercultural capacities. We are becoming more fluent in how liberal theology and spiritual practice frame our antiracist and multicultural ends “within-among-beyond,” as the double helix model generates new perspective and new conversations for reimagining the work of building the Beloved Community. This expansive, generative, and unfinished work is only made possible through dedicated staff and volunteers, with special gratitude for Erica Sanders and Pauline Eichten who transition off after many years of serving as co-chairs of the communications team and liaison to the BCST. For alongside the programs, events, and structures, it has always been dedicated members of the church who have led the way in deeply integrating this work into the life of the congregation, leaders who testify to the transformational nature of this work and steadfastly bend the “arc of the moral universe.”

Members of the Beloved Community Staff Team: Drew Danielson, Pauline Eichten, Karen Gustafson, KP Hong, Barbara Hubbard, Laura Park, Kathleen Rolenz, Erika Sanders, 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 continued to be impacted by changes, both within specific ministry teams (adapting and shifting priorities, exploring new directions and purpose, expanding their partnerships, some teams changing their name) and larger congregational changes during the interim period, including greater lay leadership from each of the COMT as Rev. Kathleen Rolenz and Rev. KP Hong assumed supportive roles in the absence of staff solely dedicated to community outreach ministries. As part of that interim work of exploring church structures and staffing, COMT members gathered for a "summit" with Revs. Rolenz and Hong to occasion greater awareness and shared conversation among the ministry teams, including:

- Opportunity to actually gather together as teams engaged in community ministries, and explore collaborations from among ministry teams, such as the compelling series "Truth Telling and Healing: Indigenous and Environmental Justice" offered jointly by Act for the Earth and the Indigenous Justice ministry teams.
- Noting the resonant aims of serving the greater community and the generosity of each Sunday's offering that goes out to the wider world, each COMT would receive one Sunday of outreach offering to support their ministry.
- Engaging with the Double Helix model that illuminates the mutuality of faith/spiritual practice with antiracist multicultural work toward a more integrated life of faith and justice. What actual difference does our liberal faith and spirituality make in community service and justice work? How might this model generate new perspectives and new conversations for reimagining the work of building the Beloved Community?

The summit resonated with appreciation and the request to continue this convening of all COMT, to deepen, support, and complexify the work of the church's ministry in the world.

- **Housing Justice Ministry Team**

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

- **Evergreen Projects Ministry**

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

- **Gun Sense Ministry Team**

Community partner: Protect Minnesota

- **Mano a Mano Ministry Team (“Hand to Hand” in Spanish)**
Community partner: Mano a Mano International Partners
- **JJ Hill/Obama Ministry Team**
Community partner: Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School and J.J. Hill Montessori School
- **Partner Church Ministry Team**
Community partner: Unitarian church in Homorodszentpeter, Transylvania, Romania
- **Racial and Restorative Justice Ministry Team**
Community partners: Amicus (Second Chance Coalition), Rondo Circle of Peace
- **Act for the Earth Ministry Team**
Community partners: Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light
- **Indigenous Justice Ministry Team**
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.

Denominational Affairs

Unity Church continued to deepen its covenantal relationship with the larger Unitarian Universalist Association as part of its continued interim work on the task of “strengthening denominational ties.”

Unity Church increased its financial support to the UUA / Mid America Region by 5% in 2022, and remained flat at \$70,540 in 2023, which is 69% of where we need to be on the path to becoming an Honor Congregation.

We hired Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, an accredited interim minister, to be Unity’s interim senior minister for the next two years. Kathleen began her ministry in August 2022.

Thursday, December 8 – Sunday, December 11, Rev. David Pyle, regional consultant for the Mid-America region visited Unity Church to meet with Rev. Rolenz and with the executive team, offer two workshops to the congregation, and preach on Sunday morning. Rev Pyle’s first workshop was on creating a covenant of right relations or healthy relations team and the second explained his role in ministerial search and how he, as a member of UUA staff, can be a supportive presence to Unity Church in the search process. His assessment of Unity Church was that it was healthier than he expected - that people seemed to be in a much better place emotionally than earlier in the summer. One of the questions congregants asked him throughout the weekend was, “Are we (spiritually) ready to go into Search again, or should we postpone?” Rev. Pyle could not answer the second question, but to first, his response was “yes.”

On Saturday, April 22, Rev. David Pyle and Rev. Sharon Dittmar of the Mid-America region staff, held a workshop on covenants and healthy congregations/right relations teams, which included White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church, First Universalist Church, and Unity Church. This was an opportunity to understand the purpose of creating a congregational covenant and to dive deeper into the work of a healthy congregations and right relations team. Approximately 60 congregants from all three congregations attended the workshop.

To generate more interest in and involvement with the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association to which Unity Church belongs, Rev. Rolenz created “watch parties” at Unity Church of livestreamed key events such as the Service of the Living Tradition, the Ware Lecture and Sunday morning worship. Some events were better attended than others. Sunday morning was held in Parish Hall with muffins and coffee served before the livestreamed service.

Finally, we continued to offer Unity Church’s program of Unity Consulting, which, while not a volunteer contribution, supported UU congregations throughout the country in their governance practice.

Facilities

We offer deep thanks to our facilities team members in the 2022-2023 church year, coordinated by Teresa Connor and Heidi Birkholz. The level of care and hospitality displayed by our facilities staff has garnered many compliments and expressions of gratitude by congregants, tenants and visitors. Facilities specialists were Olentda Bryant, Tameishey Brown, Dion Jones, Claire Newhouse, Emma Mathew-Lingen, Parker Lin and Sani Shaibu.

2022-2023 marked a year of building tenants and community groups returning to Unity Church in ways they had not since before the building closure in 2020. We continued to accommodate the many groups who came back to the building and wanted and needed multiplatform options to accommodate those who weren't yet able to return.

In the wee hours of Sunday, December 25, 2022, our alarm company notified us of a disturbance in Parish Hall. As we opened for our regular Sunday morning worship, we discovered that a section of Parish Hall ceiling had collapsed. First, we were enormously grateful to whatever powers that be that the collapse had not happened on Christmas eve when there were many people in the building. We secured the area and proceeded to call in our experts to analyze the source of the issue and the steps needed for repair. It was determined that the suspended ceiling had not been anchored properly during the 2012 Unity Tomorrow project, which caused the collapse. All other sections of the ceiling were analyzed and corrective measures were taken to repair and reinforce the entire ceiling. This project took a month and the cost of \$24,294. We paid the expense from our Dickerman building reserve because this expense was not part of our approved 2023 capital budget.

We upgraded our tech equipment in Parish Hall to accommodate larger groups in a multiplatform setting. As the needs and expectations have grown around multiplatform options, so has the need for more training and hours for our facilities staff.

We put capital pledge dollars to work on the following acquisitions and repairs.

- Upgraded our Parish Hall audio and video systems with new microphones, sound system, LCD projector, screen, camera and other multiplatform equipment,
- Replaced staff computers that were out of date and not functioning,
- Purchased a new high efficiency washing machine for our pantry area,
- Purchased and had installed new automatic, remote-controlled blinds for our Parish Hall's south and west windows, allowing better screen viewing on sunny days,
- Replaced the carpet in Robbins Parlor,
- Purchased new T-coil packs for the hearing loop system in our Sanctuary,
- Replaced the stair treads on the staircase between the exterior Ames Chapel door and the lower-level junior high hallway,
- Purchased an additional coat rack for our main lobby, and
- Purchased sound baffles (yet to be installed) to improve the acoustics in the Arthur Foote room.

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 now 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 met new requests with an interest in building relationships with important community partners. We also provided space for Red Cross blood drives and as a polling site.

Emergency Preparedness Team

The emergency preparedness team renewed its efforts by updating our emergency action plan with edits and additions, including a pandemic response.

Literary Ministries

The Library-Bookstall Team (LBT) welcomed a new co-team leader for the library, Lizabeth Bougie in spring of 2023. Lizabeth brings valuable experience, much enthusiasm, and great ideas for improving the library. Along with other team leaders Shelley Butler, Barb Foss, and Vicki Kappus, and a robust group of volunteers, the team manages/staffs the Bookstall and Anderson Library on Sunday mornings, both welcoming places for visitors and longtime members alike.

The team sponsored the 15th annual Café Unity: Poetry and Music Salon in April 2023, with both in-person and Zoom options to attend. Café Unity is a showcase of Unity musical and literary talent. The book read committee and the LBT sponsored the 2023 Unity Church Congregation Book Read and produced the discussion guide, which featured *We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir* by Samra Habib. In addition, the team was honored to host book readings for well-known Minnesota poet Thomas Smith, as well as Unity members Michael Orange and Don Brunnquell.

The *Cairns* staff, which includes co-leaders, a layout and design editor, literary and art editors, a ministerial consultant, and a bevy of experienced proofreaders, produced *Cairns: The Unity Church Journal of the Arts*, Vol. 14, 2022. *Cairns* is an annual, edited journal with an open call for submissions of poetry, prose, art, sermons, and music by members, friends, staff, and youth of Unity Church. It was published by Unity's publishing house, Reredos Press, in December 2022.

Work continued on the Unity Justice Database, which began in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd as a joint Next Right Action project of the Racial and Restorative Justice Team and the Library-Bookstall Team.

Proceeds from the Bookstall fund book purchases for the Anderson Library, LBT book events, the Unity congregation book read, Café Unity, the Antiracism Literacy Partners program, Chalice Circles, and supports Unity ministries and authors upon request.

Membership

In February 2023, Unity Church certified 842 voting members with the Unitarian Universalist Association. From July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023, Unity welcomed 17 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, 2022, through June 30, 2023:

1. Haseeb Ali
2. Erica Boulay-Ali
3. Mike Boyd
4. Ann Burns
5. Craig Cox
6. Jackie Duffus Boyd
7. Ariane Giles
8. DebbieHarvey
9. MarciaHayes
10. RachelKampling
11. Sterling Marlow
12. Elizabeth Marsh
13. Linda Quammen
14. Gaida Quinn
15. Craig Rutherford
16. Cathi Taylor
17. Kim Wolston

Welcome Teams

Welcome team members worked at the intersection of hospitality ministry and the multicultural ends of the church. Full team trainings deepened their capacity for their mission of nurturing mutual belonging and connected them with the emergency action plan and their responsibilities in it. Sunday team meetings with team practice grounded members for their ministry of welcome across difference.

Adult Religious Education and Programming

Adult religious education opportunities at Unity Church continued to span a wide range, from one-time offerings to 10-month commitments, inviting church members and friends to strengthen their spiritual practices and faith, deepen their relationship with one another, and to share the fruits of both in the larger world. Unity's adult programming continues to include online, in-person, and hybrid opportunities.

Several programs offered the opportunity to engage deeply over the course of the year.

In its sixth year, the Chalice Circles program engaged 64 participants in small groups meeting monthly online to reflect on the month's worship theme and to experience fellowship through

the spiritual practice of conversation. Led by a core of 12 trained facilitators and supported by monthly packets developed by a team of gleaners to address the theme in all its complexity, Chalice Circles served as both an entry point and ongoing sustenance for congregants' engagement with spiritual themes.

Also in its sixth year, the 10-month UU Wellspring program engaged 10 participants in twice-monthly spiritual deepening rooted in the sources of our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition, led by two trained facilitators.

The Teaching Associates program entered its fourth year, with its first cohort of 12 congregants gathering independently to continue deepening their capacity to be lay theologians in residence, equipped to support the collective faith life of the congregation. A second cohort continued its second year, meeting monthly for minister-led education and practice.

Sangha practice happened every Tuesday afternoon. 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

This was the first full year back after the pandemic and programming built slowly over the year, meeting each week during the church year and once a month during the summer, presenting three to five programs attended by groups large and small. Wednesday evening programs were attended by over 1700 participants throughout the year.

Wellspring Wednesday programs focused on spiritual practice, antiracist multicultural practice, and the intersection between them as expressed in our Double Helix metaphor. We offered a series exploring practices on both sides of the Double Helix and how the conversation between them enriches both. Other spiritual practices highlighted in programming included:

- Pilgrimage,
- Lectio divina,
- Beginner violin,
- Feldenkrais movement, and
- Queer theology.

The antiracism emphasis included:

- A year-long collaboration between the Act for the Earth and Indigenous Justice Community Outreach Ministry teams that offered eight Truth Telling and Healing programs,
- 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.

There were programs that developed connection and community including:

- Painting with artist in residence Geno Okok in the lower level,
- Board game nights, and
- Reflection with artist in residence Paul Kruse on his storytelling project with the church.

There were programs that helped the congregation do its interim work to prepare for new ministry, including:

- Storytelling about Unity's history and
- Exploration of the board's charge to the congregation in search.

Deep appreciation goes out to the many Unity teams, including community outreach, library-bookstall, Beloved Community Staff Team, art team, and other members who help make this rich and diverse learning possible.

Music Ministries

Submitted by Ahmed Anzaldúa, Director of Music Ministries

The period from June 2022 to June 2023 was challenging and exciting for the music ministries at Unity Church. Like every other area of the church, the music ministry felt the effects of the 2022 congregational meeting, both in the number of members participating and in the cohesion and commitment of participating members. Music is the main spiritual practice of many at Unity Church, and the music ministry must balance the spiritual needs of its members with its practical roles in worship, community outreach, and religious education, and its fundamental role in shaping and expressing the culture of the members of our community.

The following are highlights of the past year:

I have continued to organize the music for summer worship services, which continue to be largely lay and guest led. Summer services have proven to be opportunities for recruiting new members to the music ministry and welcoming people into our community, and the looser service structure and lower pressure allows for greater creativity, often sparking new ideas that make their way into the worship services during the church year.

We hosted the South African 29:11 in June 2022, as part of our ongoing relationship with this wonderful, service-oriented musical ensemble. We hosted them again in spring of 2023, and will host them again in spring 2024.

Three artists in residence were selected for the 2022-23 church year: Lester Mayer, Geno Okok and Paul Kruse. They carried out their activities during the year, leaving their mark on our community, both literally in the form of Geno's murals and figuratively, in Lester's powerful poetry in worship services and Paul's collaborations with Unity's LGBTQ folks.

This year marked the end of Laura Potratz's tenure as organist and Youth Choir director of Unity Church. Her role with the Youth Choir will be continued by Dr. Shekela Wanyama, and I will be taking on additional duties as organist until we have a settled minister and there is more clarity as to the long-term character of service music.

Unity Church continues to host the Twin Cities chapter of Threshold Choir, now led directly by its members rather than by myself. After a long period of preparation, this year has marked Threshold Choir's first year of activities, singing at people's bedsides, including various Unity Church members who passed away this last year.

This year I have led sessions around the country for the American Choral Directors Association and Chorus America, including sessions at Kansas state ACDA conference, conducting the director's chorus at the ACDA Minnesota summer dialogue, and as panelist at the national conference of Chorus America in San Francisco.

Members of our music ministry have been active on the local and national stage in the last year. This includes our choir section leaders' operatic and choral appearances, choir members releasing albums with their own bands or as soloists, and my own roles with local groups such as the Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Unity Singers, Unity's auditioned choral ensemble, continues to remain active, recruiting new members and easing the transition as longer-tenured members leave the ensemble due to age or life's demands. Part of the mission of the Unity Singers is to represent UU music nationally with a professional level of performance and preparation. This year, Unity Singers were selected by Chorus America to premiere a work commissioned from composer Carol Barnett, in honor of Brian Newhouse as he stepped down from his work for this organization. This piece was premiered at a Unity Church worship service to a national livestream audience.

This year saw several important memorial services at Unity Church, all of which required significant involvement of our music ministry. These included the services for Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs as well as choir members Roxy Johnson, Bob Steller, and Judy Steller.

Although we have returned to in-person activities in the Music Ministry, a biweekly Saturday morning Zoom hymn sing continues to be available for members who are not ready to return in person. In this group we have sung and discussed over 200 Unitarian Universalist hymns.

In September 2022, Unity hosted a performance and workshop by Los Angeles based conductor Alexander Lloyd Blake, founder and director of the nationally renowned choral ensemble Tonality.

Unity Church has served as host for various events in the Twin Cities music scene, including the Saint Paul organ crawl and the Saint Paul Conservatory's lunchtime concerts.

This year we organized successful performances of beloved Unity Church musical traditions such as the winter concert and dessert buffet, the Christmas carol shout, the Christmas candlelight choir, the Tolling of Bells service, the youth nussical, and Foote Music Sunday.

Unity maintains its community partnerships with OneVoice Choir, Mila Vocal Ensemble, Border CrosSing, and the Saint Paul Conservatory and in 2022 has taken important steps to begin a new partnership with Walker West Music Academy, hosting concerts by their ensembles and faculty and also including them as recipients of an offering this year.

Works co-commissioned by Unity Church from composers Linda Kachelmeier and Nico Gutierrez were given their premiere by Unity's choirs at this year's Foote music Sunday.

Unity Church was the venue for Border CrosSing's second album, "Aquí te amo", recorded in the Sanctuary in 2022 and 2023 and released summer of 2023.

As part of interim ministerial work, the structure and music of the service has varied this last year, with changes to the character and role of music taking place. As part of this work, Unity's house band has started to gain more prominence in services. Formed informally in spring of 2023, it is now part of a worship service at least once a month. Similarly, open to all drop-in choirs, begun during the summer, are now a once-a-month event to continue to invite more people to participate in Unity's choirs. These have proven to be very effective ways of increasing the number of people involved in the music ministry.

Ministry with Children and Families

Reflections and Highlights

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

The church is an *event* before institution, a narrator embodying, proclaiming, and serving a larger sacred story wending its way through the multiple pressure points, fault lines, and complexities of our modern contemporary life. If what makes a faith community beautiful is its life, its pulse and vitality, *what gives life to the church?* The framing and interpretation of the question remained at the core of our ministry with children and families, as we inquired into both congregational life and larger sociocultural challenges shaping religious life and the work of faith formation.

Attendance and participation in both congregational life and religious education programs reflected changes occasioned by powerful concurrent factors: (1) *Wider changes* including demographics, generational shifts shaping volunteer pool, family structures and co-parenting, competing priorities, cultural attitudes/norms about religious life, mental health epidemic, alongside (2) *congregational changes* including disaffiliation following conflicted congregational vote and ongoing interim process. Both congregational and larger sociocultural shifts have been accelerated by the pandemic and resulting Covid-fallout. Even as how and what we count makes a difference (whether in-person with/out virtual attendance), in-person attendance is largely still below pre-pandemic levels. “While the pattern of decline isn’t dramatic at this point, neither is the pandemic impact over. Congregations remain optimistic about their future, but it is also apparent they are continuing to wrestle with the troubling conditions that were in existence long before COVID-19 arrived.”*

Unity’s certification numbers from 2021 indicate steady increase in religious education enrollment after the 2020 Covid shutdown, but *enrollment* data remains at variance with fluctuating *attendance/participation* numbers. Anecdotally, the variance speaks to the aspiration of families seeking in-person programming and community life vital for children, alongside multiple challenges facing our families, including: relearning church habits and re-establishing sense of sacred connection after prolonged loss, socioeconomic stress on balancing work and family, coordination of co-parenting, adolescent mental health challenges, and the sustainability of volunteerism.

The Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) remains attentive to trends documented over the past two decades, including compelling shifts, insights, and learnings across denominational lines:

- Working harder, restructuring, and investing more money in Sunday school has not increased effectiveness. A larger culture shift is needed, of *teaching as spiritual practice* and *faith formation* at the center of congregational life.
- As the Boomers, who make up nearly a third of the nation’s population, shift into retirement and Gen X occupies leadership, the volunteer pool that used to robustly support the traditional Sunday school is now cut nearly in half.

- The curriculum, however interesting and powerful, will not shape the child as relational ministry does. Without parents involved, regular attendance will remain an ongoing challenge.
- Congregations that traditionally gathered as a single multigenerational body (mixing) did not have the whole picture; neither did the swing in the other direction of gathering by age cohorts (huddling), leaving youth with little connection to the larger church, and so bridging out of youth group was bridging out of church. Both mixing and huddling play necessary roles in faith formation.
- Children and youth need to be known by people in the congregation, held by relationships beyond their immediate family. In studies, for religious identity to become a significant identity, children need to be known and actively supported by at least five adults in addition to their parents. It's about covenantal life and making real our claim that "there are no other people's children."
- Families and children have different needs from the congregation and a different experience of church. Those needs are often inadequately met by church systems developed by and sustained for people who are 50+ without children at home.
- Placing *faith formation* at the center, *rather than family ministries*, provides a greater opportunity to build a multigenerational community where a culture of learning and teaching naturally serves families and all congregants.

Noting these diagnostic trends, figures, and insights, *what gives life to the church?* It may be tempting to look at *resources* for the answer, or chase after *relevance* and what attracts in the marketplace of religious offerings. But even as resources and relevance undoubtedly have their place, what radically gives life to the church has always been our *ends* that embody and seek to realize the purpose and mission of Unity Church. The church has never been the star of its own story but finds its pulse and vitality in our reach for transcendence—not an otherworldly transcendence but a transcendence stirring and acting more deeply within our troubled history than we have dared to imagine or claim. Our children are creatures of transcendence par excellence, and they remind us that what brings life are relations of revelation that expand our social imaginary beyond frameworks now worn and exhausted.

Throughout the complexities of the year, gratitude abounds for our families, teachers, and children who gathered for spiritual practice week after week, to seek a greater and more compelling story and encounter with one another, and to touch a lived transcendence in a precarious world. This considerable undertaking was only made possible through practiced collaboration between religious education staff and dedicated volunteers who make real our shared ministry with children.

*Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations study, "*Back to Normal? The Mixed Messages of Congregational Recovery Coming Out of the Pandemic*," by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research; August/2023.

*Nortey, Justin, "*More houses of worship are returning to normal operations, but in-person attendance is unchanged since fall [2021]*", Pew Research, March 22, 2022.

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 have not had interns. We will resume the ministerial intern program when we have a new called senior minister.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care at Unity Church during the 2022-23 program year was focused heavily on grief and repair related to the multiple recent losses and on-going transitions. The congregation was still easing out of the Covid pandemic and the retirement of Rob and Janne Eller-Issacs after a 21-year ministry, the terminal diagnosis and death of Rob, a ministerial search process that had skipped the year of grieving and emotional preparation which resulted in an incomplete process. The contention and disappointment that accompanied this outcome created its own layer of pastoral concern. In addition, there had been a higher than normal number of congregational deaths that had been ably memorialized by Rev Karen Hering in the 2021-2022 year, and was not replaced until the end of August by Rev Karen Gustafson, Interim Minister of Pastoral Care

During the fall, attempts to address these issues systemically included:

- A three-part Wellspring Wednesday series on grief based on the work of Frances Weller's Book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*
- One on one opportunities with congregants, small group storytelling opportunities
- Sermons on grief and related topics
- Ongoing living with grief group

There were 20 memorial services for Unity Church members and friends.

The care associates met regularly and continued with their regular contact with members.

The elder care ministry, anchored by a monthly worship theme conversation at Episcopal Homes, was augmented with the addition of a group at Lexington Landing.

Three regular support groups continued with lay leadership and clergy support: caregivers, families living with mental health challenges, living with grief.

The Embracing Meditation continued to be a regular part of Sunday worship. Card writing remained available.

The shawl ministry distributed 27 comfort shawls to congregants in hospital, home care and bereavement.

Sanctuary Congregation

In December of 2017, the board of trustees made a decision to become an official Sanctuary Congregation. We converted space on the lower level of the church to accommodate this commitment, and housed three individuals or families between June of 2018 and January of 2021.

In January of 2021, a request came from the St. Paul Sanctuary Coalition to house a Ghanaian family facing homelessness. Our new guests are an extended family from Ghana and have been with us since January of 2021. Given that the building was closed, we created extra sanctuary space for them on our lower level, and when the church opened for religious education in September of 2021, they moved into our duplex to the east of the church.

Over the past two years, our staff members and members of our sanctuary team have been supporting the family's journey with help in learning English, navigating the health care and public school systems, working with an immigration attorney, finding employment, obtaining driver's licenses, swim lessons and playing soccer! It is the shared goal that the family will be able to support themselves in an apartment or a home beginning in the summer of 2024.

Even though the sanctuary team as a whole was not active during 2022-2023, individual members of the team provided invaluable support. A hearty thank you to Teresa Connor who has been the primary contact and case manager with the family.

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.

Five 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 virtual consulting services, retreats and hourly coaching, to 10 congregations over the course of the year (July 2021-June 2022), fewer than last year. Two congregations were new clients.
- Continued Spirit Map development work. Spirit Map, a proprietary product of Unity Church and Unity Consulting, is a tool that helps individuals, groups and institutions explore their spiritual landscape, focus their spiritual practice, grow their spiritual presence, and deepen their spiritual well-being.
 - 10 individuals completed the Spirit Map inventory July 2021 through June 2022.
 - Worked to identify and name spiritual "types," people who had areas within Spirit Map that were more and less true of them, and more and less important. This work continues.
- Continued sales of *The Nested Bowls: The Promise and Practice of Good Governance*, the first in an anticipated series of books on Unity Consulting practices. InSpirit, the UUA Bookstore, carries the book and it is also available on Amazon. Sales have been small but steady.
- \$2,118 went to the Unity Church operating budget from Unity Consulting and Spirit Map fees and book royalties July 2021 through June 2022.

Worship Life

Submitted by Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, Interim Senior Minister

Worship is the congregational glue which brings us together in spiritual community to reflect deeply on the essential questions of life. In collaboration with worship associates, we departed from the regular cycle of themes established by the previous ministers to create themes that were more relevant for the second year of a three-year interim ministry.

Particularly in fall 2022, the focus of the worship services was on exploring the congregation's history and identity (transitional tasks) as well as engaging with our denominational and regional support staff with an invitation extended to Rev. David Pyle, regional lead, to preach to the congregation in December 2022.

All the "usual" rituals of Unity Church were able to be reinstated. The story and family Sundays, Merging of the Waters, Christmas eve services and the Christmas pageant, the Tolling of the Bells, Coming of Age, Flower Celebration - all of these returned with higher-than-average attendance and were met with enthusiasm.

Online attendance continues to remain steady, even as we returned to a more in-person focus than the previous year. One on-going conversation that is yet to be resolved is what our on-line community needs post-pandemic and how we might best serve them? Currently, we only acknowledge their existence at the 9:00 a.m. service, and then post the service on the YouTube Channel. Beyond that, we do not have a robust on-line ministry to those who are not able, or do not wish to attend services in person.

I made several changes to the structure of the worship service. Some of those changes are still a work in progress. I moved the "announcements" to the end of the service, calling it "congregational news." I put the offering/offertory after the sermon, instead of before. Prior to my arrival, the worship associates often gave a personal reflection on the theme of the service as part of their opening words. I moved the worship associate's reflection to later in the service, usually making it part of the sermon instead of part of the welcome and chalice lighting words. I also instituted changes to the embracing meditation - words which have not been changed in the last ten years. This is part of the interim work - to help prepare a congregation for the inevitable changes that are coming when a new minister arrives.

Perhaps the suggestion that has generated the most heat this year is whether Unity Church is ready to consider having monitors in the sanctuary. While some were adamantly supportive and enthusiastic of the idea, others - not so much! I asked the congregation to consider the ways in which their current worship practice could expand to embrace new innovations. In fall 2022 and November 2023, the congregation has, or will have, an opportunity to engage in deeper reflection.

At the worship associates bi-annual retreats, we explored not only the mechanics of what makes for a good service, but took a deeper dive into how we make our services reflect the

multicultural, antiracist, anti-oppressive commitments we share. We discussed the difference between cultural appreciation and appropriation, what is tokenism in worship, how our worship services can reflect the diversity that exists within our congregation, and how to be more theologically and spiritually sensitive to that diversity. New worship associates were added; other worship associates cycled off, and the "acolyte" duties of worship associates were included as part of their portfolio.

The musical collaboration with Ahmed Anzaldúa, director of music ministries, has been one of the greatest joys of the past year. Between Unity Singers, Unity Choir, Women's Ensemble, Children and Youth Choir and with the addition of our new monthly band, the music at Unity Church continues to inspire, challenge, and create community among its members. The energy and vitality created by the music program is a crucial part of creating a worship service that helps our members lead lives of integrity, service and joy.

It has been an incredible year of worship. Many thanks to Rebecca Flood and Nancy Dilts for their leadership of the worship associates team.

Finance and Resource Development

This annual report to the congregation includes highlights and accomplishments of the 2022-2023 church year. Reports in the area of finances/resource development cross two fiscal years because the church's fiscal year is a calendar year. We are including a written overview of the December 31, 2022, financials, the statements from the review of the December 31, 2022, financial position as prepared by Schechter, Dokken, Kanter CPAs and an update of 2023 finances.

Overview of 12/31/22 Financial Statements

The board of trustees engaged Schechter, Dokken, Kanter CPAs to review the church's financial position as of December 31, 2022, with comparisons to the prior year. The field work was done in April of 2023, and the report was presented to our trustees at their May 2023 board meeting. There were no findings and a "clean" management letter.

In addition to the SDK financial statements that are included in this annual report, the SDK report includes important notes about the nature of our business, significant accounting policies, liquidity, pledges, investment income, property and equipment, funds held by others, long term debt, endowment funds and more. Full copies of the December 31, 2022, SDK audit report are available (electronically or in hard copy) upon request.

Legacy Giving

The Heritage Society is made up of members and friends who have remembered Unity Church in their estate plans. These legacy gifts ensure the future of the church. There are over 200 people who have informed us of their intention to support the church into the future through their estate plans. In 2022 we received unrestricted bequests from the estates of Margaret Durham and Ruth Stryker-Gordon. In 2023, we received an unrestricted bequest from the estate of Ariel Dickerman.

On May 5, 2023, we gathered members of the Heritage Society for a delicious meal and a program with keynote speaker Kayla T. Jackson, Archivist at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center. Ms. Jackson has done extensive research into the history of the Rondo neighborhood.

Unity's Generosity Ministry began on Sunday, October 15, 2006. Here are the astounding Generosity Ministry totals from its inception through Sunday, October 29, 2023.

Total amount of Sunday collections: \$1,937,629.33

30% to Unity Church: \$473,012.46

70% to GM recipients: \$1,464,616.87

Unity Tomorrow Capital Campaign / Long Term Debt

We have been enjoying our renovated building since the Unity Tomorrow capital project was completed in 2012. Through the generous contributions of Unity Church members and friends,

we were able to integrate and modernize our infrastructure, upgrade the kitchen, add restrooms and create a beautiful and welcoming main entrance.

In November of 2011, the congregation voted to move forward with the Unity Tomorrow capital project with the goal of attaining \$8 million in pledges. At a special meeting of the congregation in April 2012 a resolution was passed that the “debt in the project be limited to the cost of short-term construction financing and long term financing such that scheduled repayments shall not exceed more than 10% of the annual operating budget of the church, and authorize such encumbrances as are necessary to secure such financing and such liens as are customary industry practice.”

The Unity Tomorrow project cost \$8 million. Total Unity Tomorrow commitments from 2011 – 2016 were \$6,874,342 and by the end of December 2016 we had collected \$6,653,734 or 96.8% of the amount promised.

After paying principal and interest on the short-term construction loan for 4.5 years, we converted the remaining \$1,950,000 to a long term note on January 1, 2017. This was a five year note with Western Bank based on a 20-year amortization schedule. Interest was fixed at 4.0% and debt service payments were \$142,512 per year from 2017-2021. Our capital pledges were adequate to cover this debt service without impact to programming.

In addition to debt service payments, we are allowed to pre-pay up to 20% of the principal balance each year without penalty. Since 2017, we made additional loan principal payments of \$690,937 from individual gifts for this purpose and through the application of unrestricted bequests. After five years of debt service and additional gifts toward the principal, the balance was \$860,772 on December 15, 2021, when we renegotiated the terms. The new note is amortized over seven years with a fixed 3.70% interest rate. We expect to be able to pay the loan in full by the end of December 2026 through debt service payments and additional gifts, two years prior to its maturity date. Annual debt service payments beginning in 2022 are \$140,018 representing 7.7% of the operating budget. The principal balance on the loan as of December 31, 2022, was \$719,529.

2023 Financial Update

The congregation approved the 2023 operating and capital budgets at the November 19, 2022, annual meeting. June 30, 2023, financial statements are available upon request.

Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet)

The Balance Sheet is a snapshot of the church’s financial position on June 30, 2023. It shows what we own (assets), what we owe (liabilities) and our net value (net assets).

Assets are made up of actual cash, pledges that are receivable for 2020 - 2024, deposits and prepaid expenses, investments, and the value of our land, building and equipment (LBE) including depreciation.

Our cash balances have decreased by \$329k since the beginning of the year, due in part to debt service payments and \$70k in capital improvements. You can see our pledge receivables going down as people make payments on their pledges. The change in Land, Building and Equipment reflects the depreciation expense of \$132k as of June 30.

Total Assets of \$12.3 million have decreased by \$547k since December 2022.

Liabilities are made up of invoices payable, salaries and benefits payable, deferred income and security deposits, and the \$617k in American National Bank loan principal that's payable. The largest reductions in liabilities since the beginning of the year were the payment of 2022 year-end accrued salaries, taxes and invoices, and payment of debt service.

Total Liabilities of \$684k have decreased by \$122k since December 2022.

Net Assets are divided into unrestricted, temporarily restricted and permanently restricted funds.

- **Unrestricted net assets include the operating fund balance and Other Unrestricted Funds.** Our unrestricted net assets balance as of June 30 is \$6.7 million.
- **Temporarily restricted net assets** include 2023 and 2024 operating and capital pledges that will be released (recognized as income) as time proceeds, the temporarily restricted portion of the building endowment and cumulative gains and losses in all other investments. The current balance of Temp restricted net assets is \$3.4 million, a decrease of \$323k since the beginning of the year.
- **Permanently restricted net assets** reflect all permanently restricted gifts received and held by the church and the actual value of those funds held by others (US Bank and St Paul Foundation). We have \$1.5 million in Permanently Restricted Net Assets, with a \$19k increase in value since December 2022.

Total Net Assets were \$11.6 million at the end of June, a decrease of \$426k from December 2022.

Total Assets = (Total Liabilities + Net Assets)

At June 30, 2023:

\$12,291,914 Total Assets
\$ 684,023 Total Liabilities
\$11,607,891 Total Net Assets
\$12,291,914 Total Liabilities and Net Assets

Summary Statement of Activity – June 30, 2023

Operating budget actual income was 99.0% of what we had projected as of June 30.

- Pledge income (recognized as a % of pledges made) continues to be just short of budget. As of June 30, the total amount pledged for 2023 was \$1,322,499, \$12.5k short of our year end goal of \$1,335,000. We track payments on those pledges and as of the end of June, we had collected 54.6% of operating pledges for 2023. June is 50.0% of the way through the year.
- This year's budget for Special Gifts Unrestricted and Sunday offerings is based on the giving in these two areas in 2022. Both are near budget targets as of June 30.
- 2022 budgeted program income includes Wellspring Wednesday dinner income, religious education fees, Chalice Camp and retreat fees, and bequest income for multicultural program expenses. Most are meeting budget projections. Wellspring Wednesday dinner income is under budget because the Parish Hall was unusable in January.
- Investment income in the operating budget reflects actual cash dividends from the funds held outside of the church, primarily from the Diether Trust at U.S. Bank and the Unity Church Fund at the Saint Paul Foundation. We have received the annual distribution from the Saint Paul Foundation and the first two quarterly distributions from the Diether Trust. There is \$50,000 of investment income from endowment in the approved budget. We have not yet drawn that allocation.
- Church facility rental income exceeds budget as of June 2023. One Voice Mixed Chorus, New Century Club, MISI Hungarian Language School and Medley Village are active, as are other many building renters.
- We are drawing funds from the Currier bequest equal to the monthly costs of the multicultural initiative program.
- Other funds and grants include a special Hallman Intern gift, transaction fee income and miscellaneous income. We are only reflecting transaction fee income as of June 30. There is no EV charger income in 2023, as our charger is broken and there are no available parts.

Operating budget actual expense was 100% of what we had projected as of June 30.

- Salaries, payroll taxes and benefits are the largest expense category in the budget. As of June 30, salaries were at 102% of budget. Taxes and benefits were at 86% of budget.
- Other program expense is under budget, while other administrative/operating expense is over budget due to overruns in worker's comp, liability insurance, property maintenance, snow removal and purchased services.

The June 30, 2023, operating budget is showing a net loss of \$40,997 for the first six months of the fiscal year. Total changes in Unrestricted Funds equal (\$121,807), which ties to the change in Unrestricted Net Assets on the Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet).

Finance Attachments

Request a printed copy or see links for:

- [SDK Review of 12/31/22 Financial Position](#)
- [Unity Church Financial Statements as of 06/30/2022](#)