

Rabbi Annual Report to UUCGT
2016 – 2017

In Memoriam

Ron Yatich
John Ort
Mercedes Kimling
Gene Rundell
Bill Wells

In Celebration

Linda Fletcher and Lynnette Rhodes
Debbie Retke and Melinda Duhoski
Eileen Montgomery-Richards

Reflection On Last Year's Goals

One year ago I set out four goals for our program year:

1. **Preaching** – (Sunday services committee, Sunday services and inspiration). This year working with the Sunday Services team has been a joy. We welcomed several new members and also a new co-chair, Amanda Mangiardi, who along with co-chair Hal Gurian, leads us with happiness and direction. Thanks to each and every member of our Sunday Services Committee for your hard work, vision and dedication to creating meaningful experiences for our members, friends and guests.

Our Sundays explored the six sources of Unitarian Universalism. This gave us a chance to touch more deeply into those sources: Humanism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Pagan and Wiccan, Buddhist and Shinto holidays, among others. While this was an interesting approach (who doesn't love catching beans?), it did feel a little disjointed, so we plan to **return to the more monthly thematic focus** from the prior year. Our themes are chosen through June, 2017, but we welcome input and ideas any time.

The **feedback forms** have been helpful in listening to the voices of our members and visitors about what "works" and what does not. We have adapted some practices accordingly. I encourage people sign their feedback forms, based on this article from Harvard Business Review: <http://bit.ly/AnonyFeedback> **Signing our names is a form of direct, honest communication.**

This year we had 5,395 total attendants (not including Christmas Eve), which is down slightly from the previous year. To address this, the Operations Team in concert with Sunday Services will create **an advertising plan** to ensure the community is consistently aware of our Sunday programming.

2. **Reaching** – (congregational in-reach, community outreach, social witness and denominational affairs). I am delighted that we welcomed 24 new members since the last annual meeting. I thank our Membership Team for its exceptional work in creating a smooth process for becoming part of UUCGT. Each and every week, they are here with welcoming hearts.

One concern I have is the question raised by the UUA for congregations: "Why do members leave and what can we do about it? There's no single reason, of course, but it often has to

do with a lack of connection.” As you will see below, **nurturing an environment of connection for our members** will be a high priority this coming year.

I have provided hundreds of pastoral care, including hospital and home visits, and pastoral guidance one on one and couples and families. My deep thanks to the Congregational Care Team for its constancy in caring for our members.

In community outreach and social witness, we have offered a variety of creative programs (for example, hosting #ADayWithoutAWoman and Christmas Eve at the State Theatre). I have given speeches and sat on panels for the Area Council on Religious Diversity, the Ann Marie Filkin Memorial Lecture at the national American Medical Directors Association, Blessing of the Blossoms for Cherry Festival, hosted a 2 day Bowen training, Northwestern Michigan College, and Old St. Patricks in Chicago. I also co-convened a monthly local clergy group called Clergy and Pie. We have had the opportunity to connect on several important issues.

Denominational affairs were a larger part of my year this year. I attended the General Assembly in Columbus last June, and found the ministry days preceding it be of great value. As you know UUCGT made history this year – the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) changed its bylaws to reflect membership as “clergy,” rather than only “ministers.” This was an important moment! I find the Regional Assembly of more value professionally, but strongly recommend that every member have at least one GA experience.

Connecting with colleagues (I was re-elected to the Board of OHALAH: Association of Rabbis for Jewish Renewal) has been important this year. A new group of Jewish-identified UU clergy has formed, I remain active in my monthly Deep Ecumenism group, and had a fruitful time with my regional colleagues at the Regional Assembly. The ministry days were most valuable, and I find the regional gathering more relevant to my denominational leadership and learning needs than the GA.

As you are likely aware, there has been a major “shake up” from the very top of the UUA through the local congregations, regarding equity in hiring practices and the white privilege that is ubiquitous in our Association. This process will take some years to sort through; in the mean time I am proud that we participated in the call from Black Lives UU’s call to offer a service on the topic this Spring. In the coming year we will offer more programs to raise awareness and help our Association live up to its potential for racial equality.

3. **Teaching** – offering small group ministry experiences and learning experiences for members and potential members. We offered 9 AM learning experiences several Sundays this year with good success. We were challenged by the busyness in the building of Sunday mornings here at the UU, and I stopped offering the programs in the Spring. I remain open to use of that time for learning and reflective programming, but strongly prefer not to have meetings prior to services.

Our small group ministries are growing: we launched a Women’s New Moon monthly gathering, using the UU book Soul to Soul. This group continues under the leadership of

Carolyn Kelly. Member Lee Rivers launched an InterPlay which meets month, the Little Spiritual Book Club is going strong, as the Men's Group, the Social Justice Book group lead by Emmy Lou Cholak, the LGBT Support group lead by Rebeka Fuller, Wednesday suppers, and the Vocal Ensemble. With thanks to John Bailey, I am delighted that the VE will be with us on more Sundays each month – the music is a blessing I also highlight the birth of our Social Witness Committee, co-chaired by Paula Jo Kemler and Lynnette Rhodes, as well as a great example of member- generated connection by Chris Innes through the Shanti Deva Fan Club.

4. Self-care – This has been an area that continues to demand improvement, so I am continuing this goal for the new program year, starting with a micro-Sabbatical in July.

Nurturing Capacities Forward

Crafting and Leading Worship – continue to grow in my own capacity as a spiritual leader and work with the SSC not only in management of monthly services, but building worship leadership capacity

Denominational Activities - Continue to be engaged in our region and up to date on national UU events. Paying attention to white privilege in our institutions and supporting the UUA

Member to Member (Small group ministries) – create opportunities for both ongoing small groups but also allowing time and space to offer “pop up” ministry. I offered this following our service on Mother's Day, for example, and following the U.S. election.

Supporting Leadership Teams – explore with our ministry/mission committees how I can offer support in new ways. I

Community Outreach – Continue to make myself available for public witness and community outreach. I will, however, be working on developing better discernment for which opportunities should get a “yes” and which are not on target for our organizational mission.

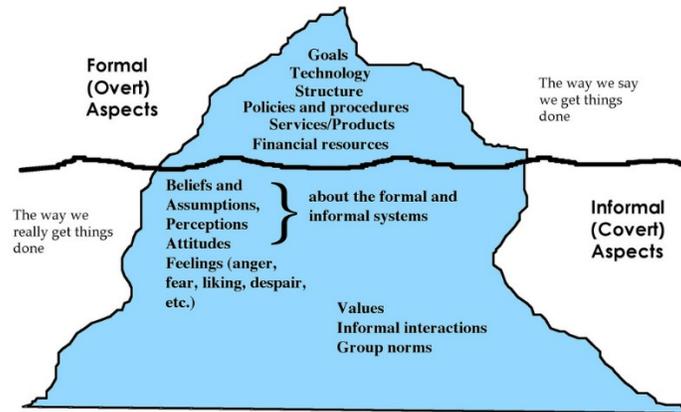
Our incredible staff – our amazing staff continues to work hard, work well together and keep UUCGT up and running. I am honored to work with each and every staff member.

Congregational Safety means not only “child safety” but ensuring that the UUCGT environment is emotionally and physically safe and just for every member. The Safe Congregational Response exists not only to keep our youngers safe, but to work for a healthy and just environment for everyone. I am grateful to the Safe Congregation Response Team for its dedication and hard work this past year.

Deep Culture

As I look ahead to leading in the next several years, I see that we are called to be realistic and honest about our “deep culture,” the ways we operate that are often unspoken and assumed. Consider this common image from the world of organizational development:

Cultural Iceberg



I believe UUCGT will benefit from continued exploration of both the formal (overt) aspects of what we have done so well in past and our history, and what aspects of the informal (covert) aspects of culture bear exploration. How do we do this?

Trends to Which We Need to Attend: From *How We Gather*¹ - Information from Harvard Divinity School Presented at the 2016 General Assembly of the UUA

Millennials are less religiously affiliated than ever before. Churches are just one of many institutional casualties of the internet age in which young people are both more globally connected and more locally isolated than ever before. Against this bleak backdrop, a hopeful landscape is emerging. Millennials are flocking to a host of new organizations that deepen community in ways that are powerful, surprising, and perhaps even religious.

The lack of deep community is indeed keenly felt. Rates of isolation, loneliness and depression continue to rise. As traditional religion struggles to attract young people, millennials are looking elsewhere with increasing urgency. And in some cases, they are creating what they don't find.

Six Themes - They are found in mission statements, in manifestos, and on the lips of leaders and participants. We highlight these themes not because there are no others, but because they best reveal the cultural DNA of these diverse initiatives, from which more can grow.

Community - Valuing and fostering deep relationships that center on service to others

Personal transformation - Making a conscious and dedicated effort to develop one's own body, mind, and spirit

Social transformation - Pursuing justice and beauty in the world through the creation of

¹ <https://casperk.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/how-we-gather.pdf>

networks for good

Purpose finding - clarifying, articulating, and acting on one's personal mission in life

Creativity -- Allowing time and space to activate the imagination and engage in play

Accountability -- Holding oneself and others responsible for working toward defined goals

How does UUCGT take into account the most up to date information on “How We Gather,” honoring our historic DNA and grafting it to some of the best emerging information?

The Year Ahead: Senior Spiritual Leader's Interconnected Dreams

I have three main areas of work on which I would like to focus in the year ahead to take into account not only the history, culture and strengths of UUCGT, but also learning from carefully studied trends in my field:

1) Growing as a Dialogic Culture that builds community, offers opportunity for personal transformation and calls for covenantal accountability

One major piece of learning I had from this past year is that honest conversation, whether the topic is development of our congregation or an interpersonal challenge, is the most direct route to building the future we wish to see as beloved community. Learning to sit together, to share honestly and listen deeply is a simple piece of covenantal living that can help us find the best in each other. I foresee this happening in two ways: 1) I will do my best to model being a good dialoger and listener and 2) we can build capacity in dialogic process as a community through education and informal interaction. (Yes, I would love to see us do more that is purely social to build this capacity.) I am delighted that a large segment of my doctoral studies will support this exploration of dialogue and deep culture work. I also see that the UUA offers an array of programs for Unitarian Universalist leadership development that I encourage our members and leaders to explore more deeply.

2) Member to Member – Creative opportunities to help each of us find purpose individually and collectively

In keeping with the first goal I would like to help the congregation grow in ways where members

connect with members through programming and informal interaction. How can we help our newer members get to know our long time members? How can we help our long time members connect with the emerging culture of UUCGT? What role does our new social witness work play in this process? Again interacting in smaller groups, in addition to shared Sunday morning experience, will help us grow in these connections. To this end I plan to offer at least once a month Sunday 9 AM programs that are more interactive. What can individual members (you!) organize to build a more dialogic culture around the most important issues in our lives? Do you work out regularly, and can you create a time to share this with others? Have you read something you found transformation that would make a powerful teaching on a Sunday? Would you meet some place for dinner with 5 other UUs you don't know well?

3) Stewardship in Its Broadest Sense – Social Transformation done in new, creative ways through Social Witness, Education and Fiscal Accountability

What does it mean to be a steward of UUCGT? The term is usually associated with financial well-being, but it means much more than that: how do we care for the legacy this congregation and Unitarian Universalism have bequeathed us? How do we carry forward what we have been given? What are the best parts of our congregation's past that can inform our future? On a personal level, how can we be good stewards of ourselves (i.e., self-care) so that we have the bandwidth to do all the wonderful things we wish to do: social justice, programming, sharing, caring? How do we ensure that all members who are able contribute their fair share so that we in turn can return to being a Fair Share Congregation with the UUA and MidAmerica Region? Stewardship is also a spiritual stance of Social Witness.

These are just a few of the questions and ideas that emerge from exploring of our deep culture and the important trends to which we must attend to thrive in the year ahead. I am honored and excited to be part of it and to take some risks in the year ahead as I lead.

In blessing and with my commitment to you –

Rabbi Chava