

## UUCGT Annual Reports 2013-14

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## **Minister's Report to the Congregation May 2014**

“Stand up! Shine! Your new day is dawning.” Isaiah 60

As your former minister of music Kevin Tarsa reminded you during your 50th anniversary service, you are on a threshold. You are on the brink of a new day, a new shared ministry with Rabbi Chava Bahle. You stand, ready and hopeful, with the strength of your history at your back. Your history hasn't always been easy. You remember the loss that over ten years of ministerial transition can bring. With all of this- your struggles and your triumphs- you joyfully greet the new day.

This year you have done a lot to joyfully and effectively greet your new day with Rabbi Chava. You have welcomed over thirty people into membership, many of whom joined for their first time. New people have accepted the call to serve in leadership positions. Many people increased their pledge, showing a deeper commitment to the mission and ministry of UUCGT.

As your interim minister, I have been looking out for the five Focus Points recommended for interim ministry:

### **Heritage: “How do we become who we are?”**

With Rev. Leisa, you realized you had some grieving to do around the departure of Rev. Chip. This year “Heritage” took the form of remembering and celebrating history. You remembered the importance of Religious Education in the birth of UUCGT. You remembered how your willingness to explore the unknown brought you to Kevin Tarsa, who came to be a beloved minister. You remembered difficult decisions and what carried you through the hard times. You remembered your leadership in fighting against racism and homophobia in the larger community. You have successfully touched on this Focus Point during your last three years.

### **Leadership: “How is leadership held and cultivated at UUCGT?”**

When I arrived, it seemed you had done some important ground work in this area. You had developed the Leadership Development Committee, which assumed the responsibility not only for nominating people to serve on the Board and other relevant committees, but for offering leaders practical tools in serving the congregation.

Leadership can be a scary call, especially if there is a culture of suspicion. I have seen how you have cultivated a shared value of leadership that goes beyond individual people. You have taken care for both continuity and new voices on the Board by proposing a structure of terms. You are sending your incoming President to General Assembly under the assumption that leadership is a good held by the whole community, to be nurtured through opportunities for professional and religious growth. Under the same assumption, you have set aside a scholarship fund for General Assembly to encourage such leadership development among your chosen delegates. Lastly, you have created a personnel committee that is dedicated to building up your staff team.

While you have made great strides in this area, there is still room to grow. One immediate concern is that while you are modeling good practice through a scholarship fund for delegates to the General Assembly, and fully funding the attendance of your incoming president, you have not institutionalized this practice. Is this form of leadership development a core value that you want to commit to, in your shared budget? If so, make it a line item in 2015!

A second concern is how you encourage the movement of trust. You have a lot of strong committees, and these are chaired by strong leaders. Some of these leaders have kept their leadership position for many years. In times of scarcity, this has carried you through. With growth in members, I wonder if the desire to maintain a leadership position is less about “no one else to do it” and more about one’s ability to trust another’s leadership. Again, you can institutionalize the value of “moving trust around” by setting a three year limit for chairs of committees.

**Connections: “Who are we in the larger community?”**

This is a good question for a congregation that has chosen to call a non UU minister. As the Vice President of the Heartland UU Minister’s Association (one of the four minister’s groups for our MidAmerica region), I hear the concerns and questions from my colleagues about your choice to call a Rabbi. Some wonder if this is a move away from the larger denomination. But I don’t think so. I see your decision to call Rabbi Chava as a choice that comes from your UU identity of multi-religiosity and the spiritual discernment of seeing a good match. You have proven this to me and my colleagues by dramatically increasing your financial commitment to the Unitarian Universalist Association. (Even though every congregation is autonomous, we are part of a larger association, and are asked to pay dues to support programs and services to congregations).

During the meeting where the Board voted on a proposed budget for congregational approval, it was recognized that because you have chosen a minister outside of formal UU training, you are leaning on denominational support all the more. A few examples: as a chapter leader, I am writing a letter of recommendation for Rabbi Chava to receive an Associate Membership status with the Unitarian Universalist Minister’s Association. Rabbi Chava has leaned on the support of the Congregational Life Consultant, (formerly District Executive), Lisa Presley in navigating the process for Associate Membership. She is taking a class from Starr King School for the Ministry, one of our two UU theological schools, schools that would not survive without the financial assistance from the Unitarian Universalist Association. There will be many more ways that you will lean on the support from the denomination as you charter the unknown waters of calling a Rabbi. Your move to pay fair share shows your appreciation of this.

This spring your call to stand up for marriage equality led you to reach beyond your walls and foster connections with area congregations and sympathetic organizations. You initiated a series of marches, ranging in size from five to over thirty people, who were not just from UUCGT, but also Central UMC, Northwestern Michigan College, and the community at large.

Last fall you became a full member of Michigan UU Social Justice Network, an organization that networks with local congregations to achieve justice in our state legislature. This coming fall you are sending at least three people to People’s Church for an anti-racism training. These are beautiful examples of not only your commitment to make UUCGT an anti-racist organization, but also of the community of autonomous congregations that we could not live without.

It is true that you are fairly isolated geographically. This means that you recognize, viscerally, the importance of our larger connectionalism. I encourage you to initiate more collaboration with Michigan congregations, many of whom struggle in their own geographical isolation.

**Mission: “What is your sense of purpose and direction?”**

The search for a new minister can be a transformational moment in the life of a congregation. In your calling of Rabbi Chava, you have come together around a shared sense of purpose and

identity. You see yourselves as a beacon of liberal religion in the larger community. A place for transformation, within and without.

Even as you have grown, this is your biggest area for growth. You are a congregation founded on being different. You formed out of the desire to offer religious education to children that was different from what was offered in Christian churches. Your first services included no offering and no singing because you didn't want to align with other religious communities. Being different is in your blood. This has served you, but too much of it undermines your potential. You have a resistance to unifying around a common goal or mission, a necessary ingredient to being a beacon of liberal religious thought and action in the larger community.

I see this in your attachment to having a diversity of Sunday services. You have a long history of offering powerful lay led services. This is a true gift of yours, and will not go away. I wonder, though, if your identity around "diversity of speakers" is less about cultivating worship gifts of your members and more about a fear of being shaped and affected by your settled minister. If a congregation lets them, a settled minister will come to effect the theologies and beliefs of a congregation. If you open yourself to the teachings of Rabbi Chava, she will shape you. You will discover a deeper feeling of being together, called towards a shared purpose and mission. But only if you let it happen. (And you, in turn, will shape her.)

I also see a growth opportunity in how you, as a congregation, identify with one common mission. Many of you have strong commitments to specific committees, or aspects of UUCGT's mission, which is good, but when there is conflict, you are quick to split into your respective "missions," or groups. Your future will rest on your ability work towards a unity of purpose that will guide you through difficult decisions and call you to a deeper vision and a more radical love. (This may include a process of renewing/ refreshing your mission statement, but is ultimately about how you live your mission together.)

**Future: "Are you prepared for new leadership?"**

You elected a hearty Search Committee who, after hours of conversation, research, prayer, and more conversation, offered to you their best choice for a settled minister. You affirmed their judgment with a very positive vote to call the Rabbi Chava Bahle as your next settled minister. You have turned from a congregation weary and skeptical about the future to a congregation filled with pride for your heritage and hope for the future. You have welcomed and re-welcomed a record number of people as members of your congregation. You have new leadership leading the way. You have shown your commitment through a successful stewardship drive.

I would say you are ready for new leadership! You are ready and excited for the leadership of Rabbi Chava, who will come not with loud words and a closed fist, but with open ears and a heart ready to listen, to pray, and to guide. It has been a privilege to journey with you on this threshold year. I look forward to hearing about your next few (fifty!) years of ministry, and will always keep you in my thoughts and prayers.

Blessings, Rev. Cassie

## Director of Religious Education Annual Report

### ❖ Lifespan Religious Education Goals for 2013-2014

My main goals for this past year have been to strengthen the Lifespan RE program in terms of congregational support and participation, and to create a program that meets the wants and needs of members and friends of all ages.

Along with Rev. Cassandra Howe, I have continued to strive to help the congregation to be aware of children and families, not only in terms of what's going on in Religious Education for Children and Youth, but also in terms of the full spectrum of congregational life, including providing child care for congregational events, and helping to make more programs available for children, youth, and families. I am very pleased to report that we currently serve 45 children/youth/infants/toddlers in some way. It should also be noted that this is an increase of 7 children over last year! Additionally, this year the congregation continued its efforts to move toward a Lifespan Religious Education program.

### ❖ Religious Education Goals for 2014-2015

My primary goal as Acting DRE for the coming year is to continue to strive to strengthen the Lifespan RE program in terms of continued growth in enrollment and continued congregational support and participation, as well as increasing the number and variety of offerings of programs, classes, and social events.

We often talk about visionary and strategic goals for our Lifespan RE program at meetings of the RE Committee, which consists of:

- Mary Cheney (chair)
- Mary Lee Orr
- Ann Geht
- Claire Cabrera
- Mary Van Valin

As a group, this committee works tirelessly to support and promote Lifespan programming for the congregation.

### ❖ DRE Professional Development

I was privileged to have the opportunity to participate in a Teacher Development Renaissance Module course this year. I was also able to Skype in for several regional gatherings of DREs and have maintained relationships with other religious educators through email list serves and Facebook groups.

### ❖ Lifespan RE Experiences

- **Children and Youth - School Year Groups:** We continued to arrange Religious Education experiences in 3 groups:
  - **The Beatrix Potter Group** (preschool – 1<sup>st</sup> grade) engaged in the “World Religions UU Picture Book” curriculum teaching world religions through children’s stories.
  - **The Christopher Reeve Group** (2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grades) learned about our UU Principles and stories from other cultures through the UUA Tapestry of Faith “Toolbox of Faith” curriculum.

- **The Beatrix Potter and Christopher Reeve Groups** joined together several times to celebrate and learn about important happenings throughout the year such as holidays and cultural festivals. Additionally, these classes have combined for Children's Chapels.
- **The Susan B. Anthony Youth Group** (6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades) used the "What's On Your Plate" curriculum through the first part of the year to learn about sustainability and healthy eating. This helped them launch into a unit on social justice.
- **Beyond Sunday Morning:**
  - **Adult Programs** – Lifespan RE offered Women in Religion study groups, technology classes and more this year. Additionally, the Wednesday Night Colloquiums have featured a variety of speakers from within our congregation, as well as special presenters. The popular "Brewing Community" group continues bringing all ages together for happy hour fun in an adult and child friendly environment.
  - **Friday Night Out**– This is our drop-in childcare/program offering for children and their adults. This gives the adults a chance to attend to their own needs, giving them the opportunity to recharge and be the best caregivers they can be. It also gives the children the opportunity to build community with their UUCGT friends in a social setting. Friday Night Out occurs the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of every month and continues to be well attended.
- ❖ **Communication**
  - I highlight RE activities in my weekly "Flash" column and monthly "Beacon" column.
  - I update the bulletin board in the congregation's hallway weekly with descriptions of RE activities.
  - I use email, texting, phone, and Facebook to keep everyone up to date on the happenings here at UUCGT.
- ❖ **Worship**
  - I created or co-created and lead or co-led several Multi-Generational worship services throughout the year. We are striving for the balance required to provide a Sunday morning experience that fills the spiritual needs of all ages of people who attend.
- ❖ **Challenges**
  - Although we have had much success this year over previous years in volunteer recruitment, we are still in need of more volunteers to teach and lead programs (we have about half of what we actually need on a regular basis). I am extremely grateful for those who currently volunteer, and could not conduct our RE program without their help.
- ❖ **Hopes for the Future**
  - I hope to grow our Lifespan RE program, so that we serve more and more individuals of all ages.
  - I hope to involve more adults in RE for children and youth.

- I hope to change our current Sunday RE Volunteer model. This new Teacher Team Model would have 5 volunteers committed to teach each given class FOR THE YEAR on a schedule that the team arranges for themselves. This provides stability for the children, and consistency in the volunteer schedule. We need 20 volunteer teachers to make this model a reality... that is a meager 10% of our total membership.
- I hope to be able to continue to engage in Professional Development, attending educational opportunities and denomination-wide events, as time and budget permit.

**In Peace,**

Sarah E. Montgomery

Acting Director of Religious Education

## Director of Music

The 2013-14 year has been a fruitful and enriching one for UUCGT musicians. At every Sunday service, there has been a musical offering—the Vocal Ensemble, or small groups of singers from the VE, a singer/guitarist, an instrumental solo or an impromptu orchestra—a fully year of special music, carefully selected to enhance the theme and message.

The Vocal Ensemble sang at least once each month—diverse selections from Pachelbel to Leonard Cohen. The VE is slowly growing and adding new members, hitting a peak on May 4, with 32 singers, including several guest singers who were once a part of the ensemble. They presented two all-music services:

- *Twas in the Moon of Wintertime* on December 8
- *A Singing Congregation* on May 4

The Impromptu Orchestra played three times: in September, for Resumption Sunday, for the December 8 all-music service, and for the May 18 UUCGT Celebration of 50 Years. There were 22 instrumentalists playing at the last two services, including a number of youthful musicians.

We continue to use three regular accompanists for Sunday services: Gary Deavel once a month, Margaret Hunter two Sundays a month and Music Director Nancy Flanagan on any remaining Sundays. Using three accompanists gives our resident musicians multiple options in preparing selections to fit service themes.

In November, the Vocal Ensemble hosted a special evening of fun (and fund-raising)—the “Fall Follies.” The Follies were a huge hit, featuring a number of congregants and friends in light-hearted performances of all types, as well as a silent auction and refreshments, and netting just over \$4000 to replace the sound system. That task has mostly been accomplished—done carefully over time, adding audio components gradually to get the best possible sound results.

Future plans include more musical experiences for our youngest members, incorporating musical ideas from Chava Bahle into worship and looking into refurbishing our wonderful grand piano.

Nancy Flanagan  
Director of Music

## **Facilities Committee Annual Report**

### Activities

Continued to facilitate the Fall and Spring Cleanup Days

### June 21, 2013

Authorized Rod Mills to assess the extent of deterioration of the north wall, and if possible, to stabilize the problem(s). Cost not to exceed \$5,000.

Authorized John Ort to refinish a second bench in the Cause-way.

Discussed various forms of irrigation that would nourish our present and future plantings.

Identified the need for a Landscape Committee.

### August 19, 2013

Identified the need to patch the parking lot and to repaint lines.

Cleaned spots in the carpet.

Identified the need to

- wash interior and exterior windows,
- apply lemon oil to interior wood work,
- at least seal the porch decks; perhaps also to power wash them,
- and to repaint portions of the exterior.

Sought advice on hearing assistance for the sanctuary, and received estimates.

### October 14, 2013

Rod Mills completed work on the north wall.

### November 8, 2013

Obtained bids for lights in the parking lot and contracted with Top Line Electric to do the work.

### December 7, 2013

Discussed the need for more paid help with maintenance tasks, e.g., lawn mowing, watering, fix-it projects, snow removal. Purchased an 8' stepladder.

### January 10, 2014

Handled several fire alarm incidents when due to construction dust, alarms malfunctioned. We replaced some parts of our alarm systems.

### February 21, 2014

Discussed the duties of a Facilities Manager and Housekeeper.

Discussed Building and Parking Lot expansion.

### March 14, 2014

Discussed wear of carpet sections. Will check with the installer about maintenance.

April 3, 2014

Planned the Spring Cleanup.

Discussed the status of playground equipment.

Discussed the need for more parking.

May 2, 2014

Met with the ad hoc committee appointed by the Board to consider Facilities needs anticipated due to expected growth.

We still need to paint the north exterior wall.

The parking lot needs maintenance.

David W. Halsted, Facilities Committee Chair

May 15, 2014

## **Green Sanctuary Task Force**

The purpose of the Green Sanctuary Ministry Team is to advocate for, educate, organize, and provide inspiration for this congregation's intentions to honor the web of life of which we are a part.

Procedures:

- The team will consist of 4-9 members
- The team will meet every 6 weeks, or more often if needed.
- There will be a chairperson, a scribe, and several project leaders who will change as projects change.
- The team will have four areas of focus: Worship and celebration, lifelong religious education, environmental justice and sustainable living.
- There are 8 steps to follow to accreditation with the UUA as a Green Sanctuary. When those are accomplished and we are accredited, we envision the team continuing to plan projects to enhance our congregation's engagement with the principles of Green Sanctuary.

Goals: The Green Sanctuary program invites the congregation to:

- Build awareness of the significance and complexity of environmental issues.
- Encourage personal lifestyle changes to promote environmental well-being.
- Reach out into the wider community to connect and partner with resiliency and environmental projects.
- Strengthen the connection between spiritual practice and Earth consciousness.
- Work to heal environmental injustices.

## **Pastoral Care Team**

Members of the Pastoral Care Team: Arline Howe, Chair  
Judith Briggs, Sandy Cartwright, Joannie Jackson, Pat Light, Marilyn Mayo,  
and Connie Metcalf.

Our Team meets bi-weekly on Thursdays from 1 - 2 p.m. We monitor the needs of our congregation by word of mouth, calls from family, notes in the book in the sanctuary as well as newspaper articles and obituaries. We then provide whatever care is needed with food, calls, visits, rides, cards and determine needs and follow through as long as necessary.

We continue with the shawl ministry and present shawls or lap robes when congregants are recovering from an illness or surgery. These shawls are knit by our own members and held in reserve until the need arises.

We continue to put notices in *The Flash* and write the "All About Us" column for *The Beacon*.

We oversee Memorial Services which sometimes includes internment services of ashes in the Memorial Garden under the oak tree when there is a death in the congregation.

The last memorial service held was last April 27, 2013 for Bill Mathias whose actual date of death was February 12, 2013. This means it was not within this fiscal year for this report. It is rare to not have had any memorials for in some years there have been as many as six performed.

We have had some member and friend deaths however and those to the best of my records show that: Erika Morse died in Jan. 2013 and Jean Saalfeld died in February of 2014, but neither of them requested a memorial service within our congregation.

Memorial service receptions are ably directed by Solveig Gustafson who has been obtaining volunteers and doing the complete reception that the bereaved request, and it has always been a nice affair long remembered by those who made the request.

We have a discretionary fund which comes from a portion of the funds given from the offertory basket passed on Sunday mornings. We have used some of these funds to help members in need. There are gas cards as well as food cards and we have also helped with funds beyond the cards. With some of the surplus funds we, for the first time, were able to make a transfer to the greater Community Need program and they were then able to decide on the needs within our community and give to those programs from our congregation.

Respectfully submitted  
Arline Howe, Chair  
Pastoral Care Team

## **Religious Education Committee**

The Religious Education Committee's primary goal this year has been to assist the ADRE, Sarah Montgomery. We are a close committee and we remain committed to this goal.

It has been a year of continued transition and the money has been tight. In the fall of 2013 the RE Committee organized and implemented a used book sale. This generated \$3,000 towards the purchase of new playground equipment. We give Ann Geht a special thank you for all her help in this project.

Our RE volunteer status has been better this year although at times it has been more difficult than expected to recruit volunteers. We do need a larger pool of volunteers to draw from for each grade level in RE. Implementing the Friday Night Out Program has been a good tool for parents and their children. The parents are quite grateful for an opportunity to be alone and we look forward to assisting them in this endeavor.

Lifespan Education, for adults, was assigned to Sarah for this year. This has also been very successful. We need to be able to meet our people where they are in terms of programming. The Wednesday Night Out Supper Program, Brew Nights, and Women in Religion Study Groups have all been successful.

We have had an increase in children attending RE this year. This is a delight and a challenge. Now that we have a "Settled Rabbi" we will have more of an increase in families with children. We are organizing for the summer and the fall of 2014. The committee remains dedicated to serving the children and their families of our congregation. We remain dedicated to improving ourselves and sharing the improvement with those we work, serve and love.

Blessings,  
Mary Cheney-Chairperson of the Religious Education Committee

## **Sunday Service Committee**

**Committee Chairperson:** Jalene Moore.

**Committee Members:** Cheryl Bartz, Mary Van Valin, Nancy Flanagan, Judy Weaver, Rev. Cassandra Howe, Ariel Love, Sarah Montgomery, Paula Ward, Beryl Striewski, Krista Cain  
Last year we lost three committee members because they were elected to the Board of Trustees. The loss of three people at one time was difficult. We were delighted to have two former committee members rejoin the committee. Currently two of our SSC members are unable to participate at this time due to personal issues.

### **Some of the accomplishments of the committee this year:**

We just had three services related to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UUCGT. I want to acknowledge the work of Mary Van Valin, Judy Weaver, Beryl Striewski, Ariel Love, Nancy Flanagan, Sara Montgomery and Rev. Cassie Howe for the many hours spent working on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary services. We were pleased and honored to have our long time former minister, Rev. Emmy Lou Belcher, and our former minister of music, Rev. Kevin Tarsa at the 5/18/2014 service. That was an amazing service to have them speak about our history.

Lay-led services require a lot of time and energy from committee members. Coordinators spend hours working with lay leaders to develop services, to create settings, finding readings, and creating the order of service. The lay-led services this past year exceeded our expectations and received positive feedback.

With Rev. Cassandra Howe's guidance we are learning how to improve the services. Our committed, creative, and enthusiastic Sunday Services Committee members helped create great services this year.

Our Music Director, Nancy Flanagan provided a wonderful variety of musicians throughout the past year and several fantastic all music services.

### **Vision for the next year:**

Rev. Howe's last service at UUCGT will be July 20, 2014. We have many open Sundays until September when Rabbi Chava Bahle starts. This summer will be a busy one for the SSC planning services for six Sundays. We are looking for ideas for these services and speakers.

We have a retreat planned with Rabbi Bahle to get to know each other and plan the fall services. We need to have more retreats to discuss the elements of a service and the purpose of the different parts.

The new sound system installed and working. No more screeching microphones and we will be able to here all the speakers.

We could use 1-2 more committee members. We are in need of males on the SSC. So if you are interested in theology, being creative, and are interested in working closely with your minister/rabbi to develop transformative worship services this committee is for you.

Jalene Moore

