

Unitarian Universalist

Congregation of Asheville



Annual Report

2021-2022

1 Edwin Place
Asheville, NC 28801

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Our open and welcoming congregation connects hearts, challenges minds and nurtures spirits, while serving and transforming our community and the world.

from the Interim Lead Minister

The pandemic made it hard to do the most important phase of the interim process, build relationships and trust. When I arrived in August, we were hopeful for in-person worship services in early fall, but that was stalled by another surge of the virus and extremely high infection rates in Buncombe County. The traditional ways an interim minister begins working with a congregation were hampered by the pandemic, and it took longer for me to get to know you. People were burned out on Zoom worship, and attendance was meager for a 480-member congregation.

I started holding two “Conversations with Cathy” per month and was invited to speak at Givens to the large population of UUs who reside there. I hosted Zoom office hours and a once-monthly *Taste of Soul*, a sample session of *Soul Matters* small group. Slowly, I began to meet you and learn who you were as a congregation and who you hoped to be in the future. With the help of Rev. Claudia Jiménez, your other gifted staff members, and the enthusiasm of the Board, talented Worship Associates, and other dedicated lay leaders, a lot has been accomplished during the first year of our two-year interim process, and we are right on track to complete your search next year. I have been grateful to the Transition Team, John Bates, Nancy Bragg, Jensen Gelfond, and Julie Ransom, who began their work with me in the fall and have continued to share their invaluable insights, ideas, and support for the interim process.

Essential interim tasks during the pandemic also included creating means of connection, additional pastoral care, and providing sources of healing and hope due to the collective trauma and grief brought on by isolation, loss, and fear. We improvised the Water Ceremony with members sharing photos of favorite water places. (A link to the slide show is next to the service listed below.) On the 20th anniversary of 9/11, Rev. Claudia, Les, and I held a music/candle lighting prayer service with distancing, masks, and doors-wide-open. Everyone was invited to take a small succulent plant from the altar as a symbol of peace.

The October Pet Blessing service was an experiment to have an outdoor in-person service and Zoom at the same time. It was wonderful to see people in person, and the only dog that was problematic was mine! Technology wasn’t perfect, but it has inspired us to keep improving. Transitioning to livestreaming meant everyone had to learn something new, again! The Board approved creating an A/V Tech Coordinator position with an awareness that livestreaming services are now a permanent addition to church life around the world.

We started a Third Thursday Drumming Circle, continued Wednesday Vespers and programming help break up the week with connection, education, and inspiration, and small groups have been an important way for people to stay connected and create meaning in a safe and confidential environment.

The all-church retreat at The Mountain in October was a wonderful break from two years of isolation, and I witnessed some of the heart and soul of UU Asheville’s beloved community. It was my first glimpse of the joyful energy and love that has sustained this congregation for almost 70 years, and I felt encouraged about UU Asheville’s future and successful search.

With the help of Brynn Estelle, one of the Directors of the non-profit organization Tranzmission, we held a Transgender Day of Remembrance service that was both in-person and online. Brynn shared with me a memorial slide show of transgender people who were murdered or killed because of prejudice, ignorance, and hatred. Recently, I received feedback from Alison Scott, Asheville’s first transgender candidate for city council, that it would be even better to have a Transgender Day of Visibility. SO, let’s do what we can to support Tranzmission and our local transgender siblings! Let us say “Yes” to Trans Visibility!

Following the service on December 5, Les led Christmas caroling outside around the new patio. It was so joyful to sing together! We held two candlelight Christmas Eve Services masked and in-person and were optimistic about the new year's potential for safely meeting in the sanctuary. The Omicron variant dashed our hopes, and we were forced to retreat to online worship again. But spring brought a sense of renewal, and spirits have soared as the pandemic begins to ease its grip on our lives. Les had been preparing the choir for a spring return since January, and all I can say is WOW! Music and worship are essential to a Unitarian Universalist community, and I have been delighted to share the planning and creation of worship with Rev. Claudia, talented worship associates, and Les, who is one of the most talented music directors I've had the privilege to work with. The A/V tech team has had to adapt and adjust again and again, and I am grateful for their willingness to hang in there during challenging times.

As the Racial Justice Action Committee (RJAC) worked on the congregational assessment, the Board engaged in a facilitated six-session reading and writing study of Ibram X. Kendi's book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, and they are committed to the goal of engaging in the work of becoming an anti-racist congregation. Working towards adopting the 8th Principle next year has been endorsed by the Board, and they will keep you updated and informed about their work on Sunday mornings when Board members take turns offering the welcome and a brief Board moment.

The Board, the Leadership Development Committee, and the Transition Team made the effort to connect with every member to elicit names for the Ministerial Search Committee (MSC). The next challenge has been to call nominees to see if they would be willing and able to serve. The slate of nominees who have said YES, will be presented for a vote at the annual meeting. The MSC will begin working with a coach from the UUA Transition Office to strategize their schedule of tasks ahead of them. The MSC will report to you on a regular basis to keep you informed of the progress, and my role is to offer support and when they are ready, provide an opportunity to do a mock interview before interviewing potential candidates.

Finally, I must admit that I almost had a heart attack when Linda told me she was going to retire in June, but when she explained why this was the right time, I understood. The Board acted as a search team with me, and we interviewed several candidates before we all agreed that Brittany Crawford was a good fit. Her experience working with a large UU congregation is a real plus.

Here's how one reference described Brittany: "She brings professionalism, honesty, and clear focus to her work. She is truly a living example of integrity. It is a joy to brainstorm and problem-solve issues with her. She is a visionary who has the ability to see the big picture while knowing the steps and the details needed to turn that vision into reality. The depth of her writing, her theological understandings, her fierce commitment to justice, diversity, and inclusion are all woven into who she is and how she walks in the world."

I'm also excited to add to your amazing staff our new A/V Tech Coordinator, Will Lundquist, who comes with a broad range of skills and experience. Welcome, Will! It has been a challenging but productive first year, and I look forward to journeying with you next year as you move toward calling your new settled minister next May.

I just want to say thank you for everything you have done to make this a successful year! There is still a lot of work to do, but I promise it will be as joyful and meaningful as it will be challenging. UU Asheville has got what it takes!

Worship Services August 2021-July 2022

August

- Something to Believe In: Rev. Cathy's introductory sermon
- Our Chosen Faith (UU history)
- Faith Development (Blessing of the Backpacks)
- [Water Ceremony](#)

September: Embracing Possibility

- Walking Together (covenant)
- Bread for the Journey (courage/beloved community)
- Anti-Racism: Rev. Claudia
- Spirituality of Imperfection (we are whole even in our broken places)

October: Cultivating Relationships

- Bearing Witness (to people who are unhoused)
- [Pet Blessing](#) (In person/outdoors)
- Mariela Simons Perez guest speaker (The Mountain Retreat weekend)
- Remembrance Service (in person/outdoors)

November: Holding History

- Rediscovering Prayer: a UU learns to be a chaplain
- Guest at Your Table: UU Service Committee ministry
- Transgender 101 with URU (Universal Rainbow Unity)
 - Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Gratitude and Song: Rev. Claudia

December: Opening to Joy

- Advent: The Gifts of Waiting
- Hope is a Verb followed by Christmas tree decorating: Revs. Cathy and Claudia
- Winter Solstice with CUUPS
- Cultivating Gratitude in Difficult Times: Rev. Susan Frederick Gray

January: Living with Intention

- Into the New Year: ritual and renewal
- Finding Peace: (being fully present to life)
- MLK: 8th Principle & Beloved Community: Rev. Claudia with A-RIJAG
- Theology of Improv: Rev. Claudia and guest
- Ten Tips for Being Miserable: Guest speaker, Neal Jones

February: Widening the Circle

- The Three Questions/Mission and Vision: Rev. Cathy and Transition Team
- Heaven on Earth: Rev. Chris Hockman (newly called to UU Greenville SC)
- The Promise of UUism: Rev. Claudia
- YRUU Service (which was awesome!!)

March: Renewing Faith

- [UU Asheville History, Looking Back](#): Rev. Cathy & the Transition Team
- Looking Forward: Rev. Cathy & the Transition Team
- Musician Lea Morris singing your dreams for the future...
- Heart to Heart: Rev. Cathy (restorative dialogue)

April: Awakening

- The Goat in the Tree and Other Miracles: Rev. Cathy and the real miracle was the CHOIR for the first time in two years!
- The Eternal Immigrant: Professor Edwin Murillo from the University of Tennessee Chattanooga
- Easter Sunday, The Tree that Survived the Winter: Rev. Cathy
- Earth Day, Embracing Hope/Active Hope: Rev. Claudia's amazing service!

May: Nurturing Beauty

- Celebration Sunday/New Members & Volunteer Recognition: Rev. Cathy and The Sandburger Players presenting UUUU v Gethsemane Football Game
- [Mothering Sunday](#): Rev. Cathy
- Coming of Age Group Credo Statements
- Faith Development/Bridging Ceremony

June: Celebrating Blessings

- Music Sunday: Music Director, Les Downs
- Reproductive Justice: Rev. Claudia
- Father's Day/Flower Communion: Rev. Cathy
- General Assembly's Sunday Morning Worship Service

July

- Singer/songwriter Lea Morris will be in person for a July 17 service, and UU minister, Roger Jones from California will be sharing a sermon with you on July 10. There are some other exciting summer services that are in the planning stages so watch for the Worship *eNews* on Mondays.

from the Music Director

This past year proved to be a challenge for our music program. We still had to continue observing COVID protocols (late summer through early fall), which include no community singing, so we delayed beginning choir rehearsals until late fall. Our plan was to rehearse for a while to get our voices working again and to begin singing for services in January. We rehearsed for a couple months before we had to stop again due to the outbreak of COVID variants. I went with a hasty Plan B, which was making do with soloists singing hymns in services (when possible), playing instrumental music, and continuing to use videos of guest musicians when necessary.

Since the beginning of 2022 we have been fortunate to have music provided by some of our in-house musicians, including Brett Johnson, Paul Moore, Will Jernigan, and Sandra Goodson (The Sandburgers). We have also been very lucky to have guest artists both from the Asheville area and from other places, including Hillary Trumpler, Tabitha Judy, Finn Magill, Kacy and Nancy Carvajal and Lea Morris.

We were finally able to restart choir rehearsals the beginning of March. With much determination we scheduled the choir to sing in person for five Sunday services, beginning in April and ending in June. Rehearsals have gone well and the singing in services has been excellent.

In the past year I have also worked closely with our ministers, Rev. Cathy Harrington and Rev. Claudia Jiménez, and our A/V tech crew, Jason Smith, Steve Reines and Steve Carter, Jessica West, and Jennifer Bennett. These collaborations have resulted in successfully producing our weekly hybrid (in-person and livestream) services.

Current UU Asheville Choir Members

<p style="text-align: center;">Soprano</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alexis Croswell• Karin Eckert• Colleen Finegan• Michele Gregory• Barbara McDonald• Myrtle Staples	<p style="text-align: center;">Alto</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gail Ashburn• Judy Clouse• Joyce Hooley-Gingrich• Nancy Nehls Nelson• Kris Stewart• Kathy Quinlan• Debbie Ward• Diane Zolnaski
<p style="text-align: center;">Tenor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dennis Campbell• Charles Forrest• Bob Gingrich• Mark Medlin	<p style="text-align: center;">Bass</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Richard Kark• Langdon Martin• Richard Maybin

from the Board of Trustees

Ryan Williams, President (through 11/2/2021); Clyde Hardin, Vice President (through 11/2/2021) and President (from 11/2/2021); Adam Griffith, Vice President (from 1/4/2022); Laurel Amabile, Clerk; Mary Alm; Michael Beech; Karen Dill; Margaret McAlister; Julie Stoffels.

The Role of the Board of Trustees

Even though this *Annual Report* is properly a report on what the Board did this year, I feel compelled to include as a preamble a short description of what we are supposed to be doing according to our governance (bylaws, etc.). I hope this provides some context for the rest of this *Annual Report*. Also, since the Board's role may not be understood by every congregant, I include this information in the hope that it may be of value.

Our bylaws don't actually say too much about the Board's "real job." (Although, they do define its role in the search for a new minister and holding meetings of the congregation—both of which are going on right now!) In fact, the one substantial thing the bylaws say about the purpose and responsibilities of the Board is, "The Board sets governance policies that reflect the mission of the congregation and delegates the work of implementing the policies to the Executive." (Here, "the Executive" is policy governance lingo referring to our Lead Minister and by extension, the Lead Minister's staff.) So, basically, the Board defines the Executive's goals—or "Ends" in policy governance lingo—and directs the Executive to achieve those Ends.

Beyond that, the bylaws refer to our *Governance Document* as the container for the bulk of the Board's responsibilities and authority. That document contains our Ends Statements (the goals) in Article I; all about what the Board can and should be doing and how they do, it in Article II; the relationship between the Board and Executive in Article III; and things called "Executive Limitations"—more policy governance lingo referring to policies that define what the Executive cannot do in the process of achieving the Ends. (Note: these "limitations" are often turned around to require the Executive actually do certain things using phrasing like, "the Executive shall not fail to...")

The very first sentence of the very first policy in Article II, describing what the Board does at the highest-level reads, "The purpose of the Board of Trustees is to ensure the long-term well-being and mission of the Congregation." A tall order indeed. Flowing from that, here are some examples from the *Governance Document* and more specific Board roles in supporting that mission. The Board:

1. is responsive and transparent to the congregation, fostering strong lines of communication, actively soliciting input on major issues, and seeking out a diversity of viewpoints,
2. engages in visioning,
3. discerns and articulates the congregation's mission—i.e., defines Ends,
4. defines Executive Limitations,
5. monitors progress toward achieving our mission (Ends) within the bounds of the Limitations (effectively, monitoring the Executive),
6. sets its own governance beyond bylaws,
7. recommends a budget to the congregation,
8. holds monthly meetings.

The rest of the report—the real report—may either directly or indirectly refer to content in this first section of the report as the *Role* section.

Our Monthly Meeting Routine

The Board meets on the first Tuesday of each month. This year, meetings have typically lasted for about two hours. The agendas for these meetings are discussed and approved in meetings of the Board Council, consisting of the President, Vice President, Clerk, and the Executive (Rev. Cathy this year).

Our agendas always have certain standing items. This year, these include opening and closing readings, short member check-ins, approval of the previous meeting's minutes, and reviewing reports. The report process includes receipt and approval of one or more reports from the Executive on chosen Limitations (monitoring, per *Role* above), the Executive's *What's Happening* report, and, at the end of each meeting, two meeting reports: a process observer's report and a racial justice check.

The *What's Happening* report is something we've been doing for a while, which is valuable enough to the Board that I specifically call it out here. Our Lead Minister, our Director of Administration, and our Minister of Faith Development gather information for the areas of ministry and/or operations they either perform or oversee and tell us all the noteworthy things that have been going on during the intervening month. The report is *very* thorough, resulting in the Board being kept up to date on all that is happening. I want to give a giant thank you to those staff members who are not only reporting on these items but are responsible for making them happen.

And one more call-out on the standing items: The racial justice check mentioned above is something added this year to make sure we look at our actions through a racial justice lens (i.e., identify any place where we did either well or poorly from a racial justice perspective). The racial justice check was at least in part inspired by the Board's intention that UU Asheville dives more deeply into our racial justice efforts. That intention, of course, was also the inspiration for the formation of the Racial Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC), the actions of which are described later in this report.

Highlights of the Year

It goes without saying that the effects of the pandemic were ever-present in our thinking and on Board operations and actions. Until April, the last time we met in person was Rev. Cathy's very first meeting in August 2021. So, Zoom we did for our regular meetings, our Board Council meetings, and our off-cycle meetings (e.g., for book discussions and meetings with the RJAC, described below). The in-person meetings seem much more energetic, more fun, and maybe more productive—we need that personal contact to operate as effectively as we can!

While something of substance went on at every Board meeting, rather than try to chronicle that month-by-month history, I'll mention of few items of note in the paragraphs below.

RJAC coordination: The RJAC was created by the Board during the 20-21 church year to (1) determine where UU Asheville sits on the multi-dimensional spectrum of supporting racial justice and (2) make recommendations for improving our "equity footprint" to become a truly anti-racist congregation. They have done so admirably. The RJAC did a survey-based assessment of our equity footprint in 15 dimensions of church life and made recommendations for improving it, organized into seven separate domains. They issued a draft report describing their assessments and recommendations in great detail in January 2022. During February, RJAC held listening circles for congregants to react to this report.

The RJAC gathered questions and suggestions from these listening circles and issued a final report in April that included that data. These recommendations chart the way for UU Asheville to begin work on becoming an anti-racist congregation; if you haven't looked at these reports, I highly recommend you

do. The Board coordinated with the RJAC by (1) providing a Board liaison (Karen Dill), (2) providing Board representatives at each listening circle, and (3) holding multiple coordinating meetings with RJAC during the year--several as agenda items during regular meetings and two special-purpose meetings to discuss the reports after they came out. We have great hopes that our entire congregation will engage in the process and activities recommended by RJAC. The Board believes this is something we all need to do together. As evidence of the Board's support of these recommendations, the Board has earmarked as much as \$10,000 from an appropriate fund for education and equity audit purposes next year.

Goal 1: Every year, the Board tries to set a few goals which we believe are important for supporting that overarching purpose in the Role section. One goal was to work on the immediate issue of re-opening and re-gathering the congregation. For that, three Board members supported the Re-opening Task Force (consisting of both staff and congregants) to help determine when and how much we should re-open considering the dual and opposing pressures of being safe and getting our community back together. Not actually part of this goal, but a future-focused broadening of it, was for us to imagine what a post-pandemic UU Asheville should look like in a wider, longer-term sense: what kinds of new approaches, new programs, new structures, or new whatever would help lift UU Asheville out of the pandemic and into a re-invigorated future? At our March meeting, this was the subject of the Board's first "Open Question" discussion. Open Question discussions are not intended to immediately solve any problem or take any action, but rather to generate and consider seeds of ideas aimed at the longer-term vision of UU Asheville's future. It was a lively and interesting discussion! It was just the beginning of a much, much longer conversation involving more people than just the Board. But, a few ideas that seemed to generate some enthusiasm included (1) using our new streaming capabilities to create worship services that use music and readings from diverse sources and voices, (2) using our streaming services to start-up "satellite congregations" in areas outside of Asheville, such as Waynesville or Cullowhee, helping grow our church, (3) using "Zoom socials" as outreach to out-of-town UUs considering a move to Asheville, and (4) attracting and engaging younger adults in new and creative ways, and potentially getting youth to participate in Board work.

Goal 2: One of the specific recommendations of the RJAC is that we re-examine our governance through an equity lens. This is longer-term work encompassing several broad questions. For example, one of our Ends (missions) is "justice," but does the current language adequately describe our intentionality toward racial justice in particular? Also, should we incorporate the 8th Principle into our own governance, as many UU congregations have done? Is there hidden white supremacy in our governance anywhere? We have just started work on these questions, but we have already decided we want to get the congregation engaged in considering the adoption of the 8th Principle, and we have a subcommittee looking at our governance in general. You should hear more about this in the coming year.

Book discussion: One of the RJAC recommendations in the "evaluation and learning" domain of their assessment was for congregants to participate in reflection groups based on various sources considering different levels of engagement in liberation (anti-racism) work. The Board, trying to model desired behavior, took this advice, spurred on by Rev. Cathy's gracious offer to facilitate such a group. She and Alison Ernst, whom Rev. Cathy worked with in her previous interim role, facilitated a whole-Board discussion of Ibram X. Kendi's book, *How to Be An Antiracist*. During the winter months, we held six separate 90-minute discussions on the book. We, of course, discussed the book's content, but we also discussed, perhaps, more importantly, our personal experiences and attitudes regarding our encounters with racism. An eye-opening experience, for sure.

Hiring a new Director of Administration: Under our governance (see the *Role* section), the hiring of staff is the province of the Executive, not the Board or the congregation. This makes complete sense since the Executive should be able to make hiring decisions in a way that the Executive believes will be most beneficial for accomplishing the mission the Board has defined. But also, our governance demands that the Board and Executive work collaboratively. So, when Linda Topp (our current Director of Administration) announced her retirement, Rev. Cathy sought some help from the Board. The Board Council (Clyde, Adam, Laurel, and Rev. Cathy) became the search committee for this position. We have found in Brittany Crawford someone we believe can add a lot to our staff. (Side note: Actually, finding someone who can already do everything Linda does is clearly impossible; but we believe Brittany, with Linda's help, can come up to speed over time. She starts in late May. Please welcome her to the ranks of our wonderful staff.)

Putting together a Ministerial Search Committee (MSC): This is a Board responsibility under our governance. The Board decided to follow UUA guidelines as to how that committee should be put together. Those guidelines have us (1) use a team composed of the Board, the Leadership Development Committee, and the Transition Team to make calls to every member to gather suggestions for good MSC candidates, (2) then ask people mentioned the most often on those calls if they are willing and able to serve on the MSC, and generate a list of 10 or more such members, (3) then hold a vote at the Annual Meeting for members to express their preferences among these candidates, and then finally (4) use the results of that vote to construct a balanced and as-diverse-as-possible MSC. As of this writing, we haven't quite secured all the candidates we need, but we're close. We hope everyone will attend the Annual Meeting and make their preferences known.

Retreats: In September, the Board held two "retreats," each two hours long, via Zoom. One was an internally prepared and delivered Board orientation, which included education about Board operations and our governance. The second retreat was facilitated by UUA Southern Region staff and intended to discuss the Board's covenant and the Board's goals for the year. The information conveyed by the orientation retreat was certainly helpful, but I believe that more information would have been useful, especially regarding our governance (which, let's face it, takes some time to grasp at the level required of a Board member). In the second retreat, we only had time for discussion of our covenant; but that covenant should help us with Board process in general, and goal-setting in particular. I believe that goal-setting discussions are extremely important and should be part of a day-long retreat—something recommended by experts on Board operations, and something not done in my time here. I hope and expect we'll do that next year.

Communications: The *Governance Document* (see *Role*) asks that the Board "be responsive and transparent to the Congregation, fostering strong lines of communication, actively soliciting input on major issues, and seeking out a diversity of viewpoints." Good communication is always hard, and we haven't found the best way to do it. Almost all of what the Board wants to communicate to the congregation finds its way into the *eNews* or a broadcast mailing. That's certainly helpful, but it doesn't always result in everybody really receiving the communication. And for congregant-to-Board communications, we currently seem to rely on congregants directly communicating with a Board member, which may be a fairly ineffective way for the Board to understand the pulse of the congregation. So, we're looking for ways to improve communications. One small step we are currently taking is to have a "Board moment" in many of the services. This is where Board members do the "welcome" at the beginning of the service and then say something about Board activities or even something about themselves. The hope is that congregants will come to know and feel comfortable communicating with individual Board members. And the Board is always open to your suggestions.

Really. The more we hear from you, the better.

Thanks

I'd like to thank the people on the Board for all their hard work and support of UU Asheville throughout the year. The Board requires significant work, and these committed members have done it with intelligence and grace. Board members finishing the first year of their three-year terms are Mary Alm, Adam Griffith (Vice President), and Margaret McAlister. Board members who have served two years of their terms are Laurel Amabile (clerk), Karen Dill, and Julie Stoffels. And members in their final year are Michael Beech and Ryan Williams. (Clyde Hardin is also in his final year but has volunteered to start another term.) Michael has been a steady presence, making multiple contributions, notably developing an extensive draft of a Safety Manual that we hope will become a part of congregational (Executive) policy in the not-too-distant future. And Ryan, who had to end his year early due to professional commitments and priorities, served admirably as President for almost 2½ years. A hearty thanks to all!

Submitted by Clyde Hardin, President, Board of Trustees

Leadership Development Committee Report

If I could summarize in a few words the past year for the Leadership Development Committee (LDC), it would be "Resilience and Adaptability." We're certainly not alone in this, but I am more than proud of the work we've accomplished under the most unpredictable conditions. First, a HUGE shout-out to Connie Silvers. When one of our members was unable to fulfill their term, Connie came on board, quickly educated herself, and has proven an invaluable asset. Likewise, to Tory Schmitz, who has taken on the challenging role of note-taker and recorder, somehow keeping up with my decidedly non-linear thought patterns. I have trouble keeping up with my own directives, and how she does so is beyond me. Natale Polinko has contributed greatly in so many ways, including her expertise on Zoom, and has graciously offered to extend her tenure on the LDC for another year. Susan Andrew is often our most inquisitive voice, asking those good "what if?" questions that I often overlook. My role as chair has become much more of a facilitator, which is how it should be. With the transition to a new Director of Administration, I've also agreed to stay on Board for another year.

Speaking of our Director of Administration, I cannot overstate how much we all appreciate Linda Topp and the role she plays. As with all things, it's been a bit of a learning curve as we discover and develop our own strengths and areas of potential growth, but I can say in all honesty, in my five years of association with the LDC, it has never run more smoothly and efficiently. We've been meeting both in person and via Zoom throughout the year, not missing a beat. In addition to our monthly meetings, we've studied and trained one another in the: "Harvest The Power" program offered by the UUA. After looking at a few other programs, we decided on "Harvest The Power," and sometime in the fall, we will begin offering it to those interested. Details are still forming, but I believe this program has the potential to transform and renew our congregation in powerful ways.

Of course, our principal task is finding new Board members and replacing any LDC members whose terms are ending. With Natale and I agreeing to stay, that second task was easy. Clyde Harding agreeing to stay on as our Board of Trustees President was a great blessing, and I am very pleased that both Cliff Hall and Will Jernigan have agreed to join the Board. I have every confidence they'll make excellent Board members. Additional thanks to current Board members Margaret McAlister and Adam Griffith for reaching out to Cliff and Will and sharing their experiences as Board members. That contribution was invaluable.

Submitted by James Cassara, Chair, Leadership Development Committee

from the Director of Administration

In general, the activities that are grouped under “administrative support” help the Executive stay within the Executive Limitations as laid out in the Board’s *Governance Document*. Although the Board remains the responsible entity for the workings of the congregation, the Board has delegated all programming and administrative functions to the Executive while the Board maintains a very deliberate “watchful eye.” This gives the Board time to do its most important work, that of working with the congregation to set the vision and direction for the congregation.

Administrative support entails five major areas of responsibilities: general administration, human resources, buildings & grounds, finance/accounting & fundraising, and communications. In addition, I am the supervisor of the membership/connections functions of the congregation, with 15 hours of support from our Connections Coordinator, Venny Zachritz. When A/V support was merely sound, the A/V Techs reported to me. Now that the system has become much more complex with video, Jason Smith as Lead Tech is still “supervised” by me but functionally reports to the Interim Lead Minister.

The day-to-day work involved in providing administrative support for the activities of the congregation is not necessarily annual report worthy. Details of specific areas of church administration are reported to the Board on an annual cycle that is part of the *Governance Document*. Here is a rundown of the highlights of our year.

General Administration and Communications: Much of the administrative work accomplished by your staff is done by Tish Murphy. She has responsibility for managing our database, Realm, which means she enters all giving information into the database and produces reports that are invaluable to the operations of the congregation. It’s through her work that you and I know what your pledge for the year is, how much you’ve already paid on it, and what other financial gifts you have given to the church. Tish also is the main point of contact for all telephone calls, visitors, and rental inquiries. She is also responsible for producing many of the communications you receive from UU Asheville, including the Weekly and Worship *eNews*, the Vespers Reminder, and the Sunday Worship Link email, as well as many of the “blast” emails we send out. Tish also produces a monthly print newsletter (1 page) that we send to the 12 or so remaining congregants who do not use email. Tish does not create the content, and Linda Topp has editing responsibilities which include shortening submittals or jazzing them up to make them more enticing for participation.

The website is our key communications outlet. The Director of Administration is responsible for keeping the website up to date, with help from Tish Murphy and Rev. Claudia Jiménez.

The website is updated nearly daily and has become the repository of a great deal of information about this congregation. Whenever you have a question about operations, policies, procedures, programs, or just about anything else, please check the website. We’ve done our best to make the information as user-friendly as possible.

Tish Murphy handles the weekly changes about worship services and the UU Asheville Blog. She also updates the Justice Ministry post and Wednesday Thing (adult faith development) pages. Rev. Claudia Jiménez updates the home page boxes for Family Ministry, the Wednesday Thing, and Faith Development. Linda Topp manages changes or additions of pages, slides, widgets, menus, and more, with help as needed from our website designer, Denise Wilson.

Other communications responsibilities: Venny Zachritz creates the weekly *This Loving Community*. Linda Topp creates most graphic materials, including posters and brochures. Kim Collins is best at

posting to UU Asheville's Facebook pages, Rev. Claudia Jiménez is second-best, and Linda Topp comes in a very poor third. The announcement slide deck that we instituted this year for worship services is created by an outside contractor, Jennifer Bennett.

A/V Technicians: These people, UU Asheville Members Jason Smith, Steve Carter, Steven Reines, and non-UU Jess Fox, have had a trying two years as we never skipped a beat in offering Sunday worship. All three UU Asheville Members were hired to be sound techs. Yet somehow, they have managed to now be the rotating team that still handles all the sound but now manages two cameras, video and slide presentations, livestreams to YouTube, and manages the YouTube channel. Over the past two years, this meant learning to use cameras, working with video files, editing videos, working with Zoom, learning how to use video-streaming software, and setting up hardware and sound systems to be able to livestream our services to Sandburg Hall.

This team of four is still learning all the bits and pieces of the video system, but we have discovered that even with four people to call upon, we do not have coverage for every event that needs to have A/V techs. After all, they were hired to work about four hours on Sunday mornings about once a month, and all but one have full-time jobs as well. The demands of the current set-up are higher and require more reliable attention, especially by a Lead Tech. Therefore, we hired a 20-hour/week A/V Coordinator who can fill that role.

Human Resources: We got an Interim Lead Minister this year, so things are definitely different on the staff. A new leader with a mission to ready the congregation for a newly called minister affects everyone's job, one way or another.

We have never hired any childcare workers since the COVID shutdown, and I suspect it will be quite difficult to do so when we need to. We'll probably wait until late August to open our nursery on Sunday mornings.

During April, Kim Collins took a month of Family Medical Leave. She did a lot of organizing before her departure, and Jen Johnson filled in for the in-person commitments for which Kim was unavailable.

And finally, this is the last year of service for Director of Administration Linda Topp. The new administrator, Brittany Crawford, will be starting gradually, working just a few hours a week in late May before starting full-time in June. Linda will remain on staff and then as a "consultant" as Brittany continues to learn about the job over the coming year.

Risk Management/Sexual Abuse: The highest risk of extremely damaging lawsuits for churches comes from charges of sexual abuse. Insurers have done a lot of work on this issue and have requirements in place to reduce the risks. We are subject to and comply with the following:

- Specific policies in place for staff and congregants regarding actions and activities, including recommended working in our Healthy Congregation policy, Childcare policy, and various Religious Exploration (RE) guidelines.
- We run background checks every three years on all adults who interact with children and youth in church-sponsored activities.
- RE teachers are trained annually on the sexual abuse policies of the congregation.
- Staff are trained annually on sexual abuse policies of the congregation, signs to watch for in adult/child interactions, and reporting requirements.

Buildings (including Building Safety): I could not do the rest of my job without the time donated by our Building Managers. Deepest thanks to Clyde Hardin, Dena Gettleman, Glenn White, Wink Zachritz, and our newest addition, John Roeth, for applying their many skills and time to our buildings. A special shout out to Glenn White, who faithfully has handled most of the year's trouble spots. Thank you, Glenn!

A note of appreciation to Tory Schmitz and several helpers including her husband, Mike Dingus, for suggesting and executing the upgrades to the kitchen and hallway walls.

Another note of appreciation to Anna Martin (and probably Eliza and Lucille) for attacking two out-of-control closets in Sandburg Hall. That had to be done before the new carpeting went in.

Each year there are substantial recurring charges to the "Buildings" account. These include bi-annual check-ups/maintenance of all our heating and cooling units, annual checks of our smoke alarm systems (Main and 21 Edwin) and fire extinguishers, annual checks of our flat roof, monthly pest control, and gutter-cleaning which come to a total of approximately \$10,000.

This year, we budgeted just \$10,000 for "Buildings" (we charge items that cost more than \$1,000 to the Capital Maintenance and Repair Fund, which is why I am always whining about not having enough money there) and will be going over that amount this year. Here are the year's less-regular purchases/repairs/upgrades over \$1,000:

- Main building – 1 Edwin Place
 - Upgraded the HVAC equipment to improve air quality (larger filters and UV-light treatment) – \$11,400
 - New Sanctuary exterior door (near A/V station) - \$1,400
 - Defibrillator - \$2,600
 - Sandburg Hall carpeting, kitchen/hallway/restrooms reflooring - \$21,000
 - Exterior painting of foyer and other touch-ups- \$2,700
 - Roof leaks in foyer and "music" closet in SH - \$3,000
 - New video equipment and sound upgrades - \$19,500
- 21 Edwin (wood)
 - Upgraded the HVAC equipment to improve air quality (larger filters and UV-light treatment) – \$2,200
- 23 Edwin (brick)
 - Upgraded the HVAC equipment to improve air quality (larger filters and UV-light treatment) – \$9,500
 - Roof repairs - \$3,600
 - Defibrillator - \$2,600
 - Mold remediation and new dehumidifier - \$8,500

IMPORTANT NOTE! We have purchased defibrillators for both the main building and 23 Edwin, but they have not been deployed because we have no volunteers to manage these. They require someone to have the defibrillators' statuses on a phone app and require occasional checking of batteries. If one is used, a rather substantial follow-up is required to get it back in service.

Resuming Sunday Services following the Pandemic Closure: In the hopes of meeting in person starting in September, we convened a Reopening Task Force to develop guidelines during the summer. Task Force members are Kay Aler-Maida, Michael Beech, Amy Moore, and Gina Phairas, and staff members Venny Zachritz, Kim Collins, Rev. Claudia Jiménez, and Rev. Cathy Harrington. Very sadly, the Delta variant of COVID-19 took over the country during the summer, so despite our high hopes of re-starting in-person worship, we chose to wait it out until December. We opened gradually, starting with masks and vaccinations required, marked off pews, no singing, and limited registration for attendees, starting at 10, then moving to 25, 75, and then, by mid-April, fully open with masks optional, vaccinations required (though we have never checked for that believing that most UUs are vaccinated anyway, and lying is probably not a common characteristic of church-goers), congregational singing, and no marked off pews.

Voting Site: Several years ago, UU Asheville acted as a voting site when the precinct's then-site had a major remodeling project in progress. The layout and accessibility of UU Asheville got such rave reviews that Buncombe County has used Sandburg Hall as a voting site ever since.

Grounds: Continuing with work related to reopening, to enable more use of our outdoor spaces, we had hired our landscape architect from the Welcome Project, Hutch Kerns, to provide designs for a shade system for the front gathering area of the main building. As we got into the planning of this project (with a report started by Kerns) we realized that an expenditure of \$40,000 or more was indefensible since we really didn't know if people would really gather out front after worship services if it was not blazing hot. At that point, we moved on to Plan B, which was to spend just a couple of thousand dollars to purchase large swing-arm patio umbrellas to provide shade and then see what happened. And then we never reopened in the fall and stopped that plan as well.

A note of appreciation to Venny Zachritz and Kate Jerome who envisioned and worked with a contractor to create our new patio below the deck of 1 Edwin Place.

The campus is presently "groomed" by a contractor (a local Black-owned business) to do the mowing, weeding, leaf-blowing, and mulching. In addition, we have "grounds gremlins" who continue to show up and perform targeted weeding and other maintenance. Our new Grounds organizers are Doug Ryan and Kate Jerome, who have taken over the leadership from hard-working Nancy Herbert.

Purchases for grounds improvements:

- Picnic tables for deck - \$2,500
- New patio - \$18,300
- Study for front patio shade structure - \$1,800

Solar Panels: We still have them; they still work beautifully. Check in with Dan Clere if you want to learn more. (See page 47 for more information.)

Memorial Garden

Ann Sanders Cargill, Ruth Christie, Gail Hyde, Nancy Gouin, Kate Jerome, Richard Kark, Will Lundquist, LaDonna Pfaff, Phil Roudebush, Jody Watts, Venny Zachritz.

With pandemic restrictions lifted, interments at the UU Asheville Memorial Garden resumed. Team members continued to maintain the memorial garden and surrounding beds. Our team appreciates the

new steps from the upper parking lot and the handsome walkway that provide a pleasant path from the church to the memorial garden.

Submitted by Ruth Christie

Risk Management-Safety Committee

Michael Beech, Chair; Ryan Smith-Williams; Gregory Lyman; Ben Fleming; Walter Zachritz; Tom Dessereau; Kim and Ian Stewart; Venny Zachritz, Staff Liaison; ad hoc members, Linda Topp (specific to administrative issues), Kim Collins and Jen Johnson (specific to RE)

Because it is a complicated undertaking that requires buy-in from the congregation, the Board appointed a special task force to develop a safety plan to specifically address responses to a fire on campus or an armed intruder scenario. This is the third time in the past eight years that a committee has tried to accomplish this. As of this writing, through no fault of anyone, really, this committee is no longer in existence.

Finance/Accounting & Fundraising

The congregation has done a terrific job of donating money for the operations of the church during the pandemic. Some of our donors were unable to meet their pledges, while others were able to donate beyond their pledges. (By the way, that's the way it's supposed to work—we are stronger together, right?) Nearly normal donations, coupled with lower-than-normal spending, will result in a surplus for the 20-21 fiscal year. The surplus will be transferred to the Capital Maintenance & Repair Fund since the Contingency Fund is currently at its recommended limit of 15% of annual income per the Board's *Governance Document*.

In addition to providing advice and counsel to the Director of Administration and reviewing our financial reports, the FAC conducts biannual mini-reviews of randomly selected accounting transactions in several categories (payroll, accounts payable, bank statements) of the congregation's accounting system. Two mini-reviews were conducted this past year.

We continue to use Do Good Books (owned by Christine Magnarella Ray) for bookkeeping services.

As noted in last year's *Annual Report*, Bob Lane, Clyde Hardin, and Wink Zachritz drafted a policy and procedures for a new Justice Fund to be implemented using startup funds UU Asheville earned from the UUA's Legacy Challenge program. Three-quarters of the money were used to pay off the remaining Welcome Project loan. The final quarter was to be used to start this new Justice Fund. A second idea came from Rev. Mark Ward, who suggested that perhaps we could use the entire fund as a "reparations" donation to a group in Asheville. The pandemic disrupted this discernment process, and following the recommendation of the Executive, we will await new ministerial leadership before deciding exactly what to do with the money.

This year we added to our investment in Mountain Bizworks as a socially responsible community investment. As of April 30, 2021, we have \$81,212 at Mountain Bizworks. Also related to Mountain Bizworks, the forgivable loan from the federal Payroll Protection Program of \$90,138.00 that we got through Mountain Bizworks has been forgiven. This money is used to make payroll expenses, but a similar amount will fund capital needs we will incur with changes in the way we do things following the pandemic (think full video recording, HVAC upgrades, and improved outdoor spaces).

[Click here](#) for the proposed budget for 2021-22. As of this writing, the projected bottom line for 20-21 (this current church year) looks to have a surprising surplus of about \$52,000. As is always the case, a few line items have gone over budget for reasons that were unpredictable at the start of the year, and some lines will end up under budget. Additionally, we had higher contributions from nearly every source than we expected.

The Annual Budget Drive (ABD), renamed the Annual Giving Drive (AGD): “Opportunity is Knocking”

Another pandemic lockdown at the start of the year made it impossible to recruit a new Annual Giving Drive team. Since it would be another virtual drive with no in-person contacts, the need for a planning committee was reduced. This is NOT GOOD for next year, but that’s just what happened.

This year’s AGD was conducted via blast emails, a snail mail letter, announcements from the pulpit, and continuing “blurbs” in various *eNews* editions. For the two previous years, we had a goal of \$670,000, which we never got close to. Consequently, we privately held hope for \$645,000, but that too has been missed. Because the annual budget is based on a goal of \$645,000, the Board and Executive, with agreement from attendees of April’s Budget Town Hall (budget hearing), intend to do a second ask early in the fall to help reduce the size of the projected deficit.

UU Asheville Auction (virtual): “The Enchanted Garden” on November 6, 2021

Leaders: Tory Schmitz and Margaret McAlister. Team: Ann McLellan, Judy Galloway, Deb Holden, Sally Witkamp, Marta Reese, Chris VanWandelen, Ann Perry

We started our planning in March 2021 for an in-person gala dinner and live auction at AB Tech Conference Center with the Ettison Group providing catering. In August, with the Delta coronavirus variant flourishing, we again decided to move to a fully online event. We were able to meet our goals of having an enjoyable event, providing opportunities for connection throughout the year, and supporting the congregation financially – even exceeding our net income from prior years.

Online silent auction: We used our software vendor, ReadySetAuction, to create an online silent auction. We included crafts and handmade items again. And we offered many of the popular parties, dinners, and events donated by the members of the congregation. The in-person events were limited to a relatively small number of attendees to allow for safe social distancing. We included the new UU Asheville cookbook, created by Sally Witkamp, Fredda Mangel, and Sherry Lundquist as a separate fundraiser in the online catalog.

Online live auction and gala:

- Entertainment: We recruited youth talent from the congregation and compiled videos to add to the evening’s online gala.
- Auctioneer: Allen Brasington, our auctioneer, donated his services. A small group of “spotters” and recorders joined Allen in Sandburg Hall for the very successful live auction.
- Tech support: Jen Bennett provided expert tech support for the evening.

Financials: Once again, the congregation showed amazing generosity and support! The auction took in \$32,622.35, and spent \$3,536.38, for a net income of \$29,085.97. For comparison, in 2020 (our first all online auction), our income was \$29,599.60, our expenses were \$3,113.96, and our net income was \$26,445.64.

Lessons learned:

- The online silent auction was easy and successful. We plan to continue an online component even when we return to an in-person gala and dinner.
- We are a flexible and dynamic team and learned some new online auction and Zoom skills.
- The congregation was extremely engaged and supportive in both the silent and live auctions.

Holiday Craft Fair, Equal Exchange Coffee Sales, and Acoustic Journeys

These fundraisers did not occur this year due to the COVID lockdown. We hope they will resume in the coming year. Acoustic Journeys will be the hardest to resume as we have no “booking agent” for musicians. It would be great to continue to host a concert series here.

Building Rentals

Our buildings normally provide three benefits for UU Asheville: they are home to our own programs and activities; they are a source of funds; they are resources we offer to the community.

During the part of the year we were shut down, we did not rent our buildings at all, except for the cooperative preschool that uses 21 Edwin. They met throughout the year, holding most classes outside. That’s a bunch of tough preschoolers. Rentals are beginning to resume now. Consequently, instead of our approximate \$15,000 in rental income we budgeted, we will earn about \$9,100.

Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) Report

Marta Reese, Chair, Sammy Fong, Clyde Hardin, Monica Youngman, and Andrea Hale. We’re looking for one more member, please email administrator@uuasheville.org.

Below is a list of the FAC’s responsibilities with notes on how such responsibilities were conducted:

- Meet at least quarterly and review drafts of all financial reports.
 - We met 5 times; September 27, October 25, December 6, January 26, and March 30.
- Conduct a mini-review of accounting procedure compliance at least two times a year using the UU Asheville financial review checklist, ensuring in part that the financial procedures are followed.
 - We updated the review checklist and developed a template to document the review.
 - We conducted two mini-reviews: Marta and Sammy reviewed the period from 1/1/21-6/30/21 and Marta and Monica reviewed the period from 7/1/21-12/31/21.
- Ensure that monies spent from any restricted fund meet the criteria of the restriction via the monthly reports and the periodic mini-review.
 - This was done during the two mini-reviews noted above.
- Advise the Executive on general financial matters.
- Review annually existing and proposed financial policies and procedures.
 - We did this during the October 25 meeting. We discussed how policy was updated to have a member of the FAC review bank reconciliations.
 - During the December 6 meeting, we voted to amend the financial policy and procedures to remove the requirement that all checks over \$5,000 be signed by two people. Instead, we voted to require that all transactions over \$5,000 be approved by 2 people.
- Review the annual budget developed by the Administrator and recommend it to the Executive for presentation to the Board, which presents it to the Congregation for a final vote at the Annual Meeting.

- Reviewing the annual budget was the most challenging task FAC encountered this year. Linda Topp, Director of Administration, began the discussion about the 22-23 budget during our December 6 meeting. At that time Linda presented a very preliminary budget projection showing a potential deficit of approximately \$80,000.
- An updated budget projecting a loss of approximately \$123,000 was presented at our March 30 meeting. Based on discussions during that meeting, we were able to reduce the projected loss to approximately \$89,000. The biggest contributing factors to the projected loss include lower projected pledges, a 5.9% cost-of-living increase, the addition of a halftime A/V Tech, the adjustment of RE Educators' salaries, and an increase to our contribution to the UUA Fund. After lengthy discussions, the FAC voted to support this budget. We are fortunate to have a Contingency Fund that can cover this projected deficit, so the consensus was that it was important to continue to invest in our staff as we come out of all the unknowns created by the pandemic and prepare for a new minister. In looking beyond the 22-23 budget, the FAC would be hesitant to continue to use the Contingency Fund to cover operating deficits.
- The deficit budget was presented to the Board on April 5 and at a Budget Town Meeting on April 24. It will be discussed again and voted on during the Annual Meeting on June 12.

THANK YOUS:

- To Linda Topp for being the most amazing Director of Administration and whom we will miss TERRIBLY!
- To Christine Magnarella Ray for her outstanding bookkeeping.
- To Tish Murphy for her work and support.
- To all the FAC Members who have given such careful thought to the important financial issues of our UU Asheville Congregation.

Submitted by Marta Reese, Chair, Finance Advisory Committee

Legacy Circle Committee

Mike Horak, Chair; members Myrtle Bennett, Gene Lambirth, and Mara Sprain

The Legacy Circle Committee is focused on providing members and friends of UU Asheville with information about how they can provide planned gifts to support and expand the congregation's mission into the future. The committee provides information ranging from how to name UU Asheville as a beneficiary in a will or retirement plan to area attorneys that can provide guidance on estate planning. It also works to steward and thank those members who have already documented a planned gift.

The immediate impact of these efforts is often hard to measure, as it may take decades for a planned gift to be realized. Last year, UU Asheville received bequest income totaling \$15,802. Seventy-five percent (\$11,852) went into the Fund for the Future, and 25 percent (\$3,950) went to the Contingency Fund, per Board policy.

The Legacy Circle Committee continued to meet throughout the church year, but its work was curtailed significantly by COVID safety requirements.

- The committee hosted a virtual workshop with Elder Law Expert Caroline Knox on estate planning on November 13. The Zoom event was well attended, with more than 35 participants.

Leading up to the workshop, the committee made a special effort to reach out and invite younger families to participate.

- In February, the committee reached out to the 54 different households representing the 87 Legacy Circle members with a special Valentine's Day card to thank them for naming UU Asheville in their estate plans.
- A reception, generally held every two years to honor members of the Legacy Circle, was again postponed because of COVID concerns. The committee is currently planning to hold the reception this fall. A save-the-date card with details will be mailed soon.
- The Legacy Circle is now recruiting UU Asheville members and friends to serve on the committee for the 22-23 church year. Anyone interested should contact any member of the Legacy Circle Committee.

Membership

The Connections Coordinator's main job is to assist members and newcomers to feel connected to the congregation. Statistics show that the greater the connection, the more likely it is that members/newcomers will 1) be active contributors of time, talent, and resources within the congregation, 2) represent the congregation within the community, and 3) remain members for longer periods. Both members and newcomers feel better connected to the greater congregation because of the Connections program. In addition to other support, they are given information about both spiritual and social groups in which they can participate.

In 2021, in conjunction with a local company, Online Training Concepts, an online membership course was developed. This course allows interested individuals an opportunity to receive information about UU Asheville, complete the course on their own time, and satisfy the bylaw requirements of membership through this course. Currently, we have had 15 individuals complete the course and join UU Asheville in 21-22. Not surprisingly, in 20-21, we accepted no new members.

In-person Newcomer Gatherings have resumed with our reopening. Attendance at the first gathering in April was large (20 individuals), and several have expressed an interest in involvement and membership.

Additional duties include: organizing newcomer events, welcoming newcomers weekly via email, sending out the weekly *This Loving Community* (TLC) e-newsletter, annual updating of the Directory of Connections and Social Groups booklet, and alerting the Ministers about any member issues that come my way.

Submitted by Venetia Zachritz, Connections Coordinator

from the Minister of Faith Development



All staff outing with Hoodhuggers

As I compile this report, I am deeply grateful for all who remained connected and engaged with UU Asheville, virtually and in person. Our community has been active this year! I am also grateful for the support of our interim minister, Rev. Cathy Harrington, who arrived in August. We have been getting to know each other and are learning to leverage the skills we each bring to our areas of ministry. We strive to create space for supportive and creative conversations on how to move forward as we continue to co-exist with COVID. We remain a vibrant community despite the past two years, even as we mourn the milestone of one million

deaths in the United States due to COVID and

countless others worldwide. We have all been touched by grief and loss during this time. Community and connection have been and will be crucial to our resilience.

The reports that follow testify to the ongoing work of spiritual deepening and justice outreach that UU Asheville is committed to. We are transitioning from virtual to in-person, livestreamed Sunday services. It has been a joy to see your masked and unmasked faces these last few weeks in the sanctuary. Visitors are crossing our doors, and some are seeking membership.

Zoom and YouTube have become part of our lives. Who knew hybrid church would be part of the new way of doing things? Now, we have more choices. I am always asking if meetings with individuals are via Zoom, in person, or by phone. Committee and staff meetings can be in person, virtual, or both simultaneously. What a joyful, humbling, exciting, and challenging time to be in ministry! Below are a few general highlights and observations for this year.

This June, I will participate in General Assembly and receive full UUA Fellowship as a result of successful evaluations during these last three years of ministry. You welcomed, challenged, and supported me. Gracias! I look forward to our continuing work together.

This is the year when the Board and your congregational vote in June will approve a budget that provides our religious coordinators a salary and a title, religious educators, that reflects the work they have been doing in the congregation since I arrived four years ago. Thank you, Kim and Jen! We are grateful for your persistence, professionalism, and continued commitment to our religious exploration programs!

This year, the Racial Justice Advisory Council (RJAC) submitted their final report to the Board and you, the congregation, with recommendations on how we move toward liberation for all, especially our Black siblings. Thank you to council members Noah Hall, Eleanor Lane, Melissa Murphy, and Ed Prestemon for your commitment to the Council.

In appreciation for UUA's ongoing support during the fellowshiping process and as needs have arisen during my ministry with you, I consider it important to give back and stay engaged with the larger

denomination. This year I co-led the class Leading UU Cultural Change for religious professionals, mentored a Religious Educator who was successfully credentialed in April 2022, and served on a colleague's Committee on the Ministry as they pursued the path of final Fellowship. During this time of ministerial transition, our denomination's support has been invaluable. In that context, I note that we have no denominational affairs group at UU Asheville, nor do we pay our fair share contribution to the UUA. I hope we address these two situations in the future.

I have learned a lot during this pandemic time about the importance of community, the importance of rest and doing less, and the usefulness of technology to keep us connected. I've also been challenged to reconsider worship, as occurring not only on Sunday morning but in the many ways we gather to support each other, to be present to the beauty of nature and human creativity, and to put our faith into action.



Volunteers build community as they care for our campus. Gracias!

During this time of transition and regathering, may we be grateful for the presence of this faith community, our connection to each other, and the collective impact we can have if we commit ourselves joyfully to the work of liberation--our own and that of all marginalized communities.

Faith Development

This year, we launched our programs in October due to uncertainties related to the COVID variant. Most programs met via Zoom. Some chose by consensus and with adherence to safety precautions to meet in person. We have all been yearning to be in person, so we strove to be flexible while maintaining safety protocols.

Children & Youth Faith Exploration

Staff: Kim Collins and Jen Johnson, Religious Educators

Religious Education Think Tank: April DeLac, Lisa Horak, Ryan Williams (Teacher Appreciation)



Coming of Age meets, masked, on the new patio (Fall 21)

This year we were unable to recruit members for the Religious Education Council. Outgoing members usually replace themselves. However, due to COVID and other time commitments, we only had two members, April and Lisa, with whom I brainstormed and planned as needed throughout the year. Thank you for your time and wisdom! Ryan joined us in April to support the planning of this year's Teacher Appreciation Breakfast. This

task force of three modeled for

me the possibility of using a task force for a specific project or event without meeting monthly. You'll see more task forces in my report next year.

First things first: We changed the name of our program! We have been internally making the shift from Religious Education to Religious Exploration (RE) for a while now, so it was time to make that change official. While there is still education involved, we feel that exploration more accurately reflects what we are doing in RE. We have learned over the last couple of years that flexibility and adaptability are key. We had hoped to begin RE in a more "normal" way this year, but the Delta variant put a stop to those plans in late August, so we got flexible again (we are very good at flexibility now!) and found ways to make sure our children in youth could safely participate in RE. It was a challenge to adapt to variants of the virus, changing rules for masking and meetings indoors, and the availability of vaccines for children and youth. We started the year with a combination of in-person and online RE options and are ending it with everyone meeting in person! When we began the year, vaccines were not available for all children and youth, so in-person groups began meeting as vaccines became available for the younger crowd.

We had some big successes this year, along with some things that didn't go the way we had hoped, but we have also learned not to sweat the small stuff! We were able to bring back our popular Coming of Age (CoA) program for 9th & 10th graders. We had a small but dedicated group participating in our Young Religious Unitarian Universalist (YRUU) high school group. Our Junior Youth Group for 6th-8th graders moved into a new space and got to know each other again by playing games and having some deep conversations. Our littlest children spent time getting back into the rhythms of church--some of

our Spirit Play kids do not remember being at church before the pandemic because they were so little then! Our K-8 groups did take an in-person break in the winter due to the Omicron variant. We offered an online option during this time but had no takers. We also expanded our Family Ministry offerings this year, including congregation-wide events as well as some gatherings just for families with children. Keep reading, and we'll tell you all about it!

Here are some numbers:

- We had 70 families register for RE with 108 individual children and youth registered.
- We again asked families to register this year even if they were unsure of their participation in light of changing COVID numbers and recommendations. In this way, families were able to stay plugged in with what we are offering--whether it be Sunday RE groups, congregational events, all ages services, off-campus family gatherings, and general information about what we're up to.
- Our average Sunday RE attendance was 25 people, including volunteers! While Coming of Age and YRUU met on most Sundays, K-8 groups met twice a month, so the average attendance doesn't necessarily reflect attendance on weeks when everyone was meeting.

Summer 2021. Summer typically brings a chance to take a breath, assess our past year and program needs, and plan for the upcoming year. While we did not have consistent in-person RE sessions the previous year (2020-21), we did have a few in-person, outdoor meet-ups for families. We had an especially great time meeting up at the WNC Nature Center and checking out all the beautiful animals there. Like the rest of the church, we had July to take a bigger collective breath while suspending regular programs after the intensive first year plus of COVID.

There was still plenty of behind the scenes work happening at this time: discerning and defining our program approach in the still questionable, "How and what can we do church and RE when so much is unknown?" period; recruitment for volunteers to serve our children, youth, and families; some big clean-out projects started (including an RE workday with 15 helpers from ages 8-70+), and preparing for and setting all the usual tasks and groups in motion. We were able to resume some in-person volunteer training, including some new youth group leader training to better support our two high school groups. We were happy to have more faces gathering outdoors on our UU Asheville campus (and fortunately, the weather almost always cooperated).

I'm sure you'll read in another part of the *Annual Report* that our campus was developed to now house a lovely stone patio and vastly improved "below deck" shady gathering spot with picnic tables. We also purchased chairs and canopies to accommodate outdoor RE (and other) groups, which were used a good amount in the fall especially (and at retreats) and will likely continue. It was a smart thing to invest in safer in-person gatherings. We hope to continue to "get out of the house" more often, even in less risky times.

Childcare

Staff: Kim Collins

Childcare was not offered at UU Asheville in 21-22 due to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. We did not begin in-person services until December, so we ended up not hiring anyone this year. We plan to resume childcare in September 2022 with two providers during the single service on Sundays. We are hoping to combine paid staff with volunteers to be more flexible about childcare needs and the challenges of scheduling childcare when it's possible that no one will need it. As we are working to make worship more accessible to everyone, one strategy we will try out is having a paid childcare worker

available in Sandburg Hall to assist parents whose kiddos may need to move around or make more noise, but who still want to view and listen to the service broadcasted into Sandburg Hall.

Spirit Play (Pre K-2nd Grade)

*Volunteers: Jen Oversmith, Nancy Perna, Sandra Goodson, Sarah Palmer Kirkpatrick, and Ruth Christie
Staff: Kim Collins*

We began online in October this year. We had planned to be in person, but the Delta variant meant that we ended up meeting virtually for the first couple of months. We also met online in November, supplemented by a family outing to a mini-golf course which was fun for all, even for our very young participants who were new to mini-golf! We started meeting in person in December, and we met an average of twice per month at 10 am before worship. We met at this time due to concerns about having too many people in our spaces as well as a lack of volunteers. We focused on stories and rituals this year, using the monthly *Soul Matters* themes to guide our story and activity choices. We also made good use of the contemplation room over the winter when it was too cold to play outside. We used our circle time to share and get to know each other. Many of our kids in this age group were either new to church altogether or didn't remember coming to church before the pandemic began. We shared our joys and sorrows and found connections with each other through caring for each other.

Elementary Group (3rd-5th Grades)

*Volunteers: Laurel Cadwallader Stolte, Anna Martin, Sandra Goodson, and Amy Glenn
Staff: Kim Collins*



Mini golf outing featuring Pre K - 6th grade kids and parents

Like Spirit Play, this group met online in the early fall and transitioned to in-person in December. We met 2x per month and got to know each other again. Laurel and Anna took on most of the planning and leading of this group. We used the *Soul Matters* packet for resources and ideas relating to the monthly theme. We had great attendance for the Elementary Youth CON and the Intermediate Youth CON at The Mountain. Special thanks to Anna Martin for encouraging registration, recruiting chaperones, organizing carpools, and chaperoning herself! Altogether, we had at least 25 children, youth, and adults attend the first Youth CONs at The Mountain in two years!

Junior Youth Group (6th-8th Grades)

Volunteers: Wendy Fletcher, Sandra Goodson, and Julie Ransom
Staff: Kim Collins

Junior Youth Group (JYG) started meeting in person outdoors in October. As the weather got colder, we transitioned inside to a new room with new comfy furniture and a dedicated whiteboard, which got a lot of use as we played, shared, and brainstormed. This group had a lot of variety this year, doing everything from a group hike to inventing (maybe) UU Pictionary. As with the other groups, we spent time getting to know each other again and welcoming some brand-new faces. We explored our faith through art, games, and deep discussions on current events and how our faith shapes our values. Junior Youth Group (JYG) will continue next year but with monthly meetings outside of Sunday mornings. Our hope is that kids in this age group will develop connections with each other and each other's families that will serve their experiences in Coming of Age and YRUU and ultimately, their transition into UU adulthood. This group also had great representation at the Mountain Youth CON in March!



UU Asheville youth at The Mountain in March 22

Coming of Age (CoA)

Volunteer facilitators: Allen Currens, Brian Daniel, Lisa Forehand, Steve Lapointe, and Gina Phairas
Volunteer mentors: Mame Fleming, Shawn Gibson, Allison Hardesty, Clyde Hardin, Sarah Hargrove, Laurel Jernigan, Maggie Poist Reynolds, Missy Reed, Tony Reed, and Will Smith.
Staff: Jen Johnson.



Coming of Age at the Fall Retreat in October 21

We were happy to bring back Coming of Age (CoA) this year for our 9th-10th graders. Ten youth began their journey together in September to look deeper into themselves and our UU community—to better

understand, define, and articulate their spiritual beliefs and values, how our liberal faith shapes their lives, and how to enact that in the world.

This program is big work all year long with leader and mentor recruitment, training, and meetings; family orientation; two special ceremonies (to open and close the year); four retreats; mentor/youth

meet-ups; credo creation; the “Credo Sunday” worship service; as well as the normal weekly Sunday class sessions! Oh, and planning and fundraising for a summer youth trip. Phew! All good stuff but not light work.

These meaningful events have an intentional significance for all involved in the Coming of Age program: youth, parents, and the caring UU adult volunteers who are on the journey with them. Special events like these provide an opportunity to build a stronger community among peers and between the generations; encourage deeper exploration of their faith and beliefs; symbolize and support changing family dynamics as teens mature and families negotiate new roles and responsibilities; and honor and celebrate those developmental milestones.

A peek into CoA-land:

- Opening ceremony (September): About 45 multi-age UUsers gathered in small family/mentor pods outdoors for a meal and time to get to know each other. Wow, what a feeling and celebration gathering in person after 18 months of being mostly apart! Revs. Cathy and Claudia each shared a message, and facilitators led a ritual to officially launch the CoA year together.
- Fall retreat (October): Youth, mentors, and facilitators had a day at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly Retreat Center for community building, games, challenges, and rituals.
- Sunday class sessions (all year): Most Sundays the youth and facilitators met on campus to dive into some “big questions,” UU values, and current events; attend worship together; do a service and learning field trip at BeLoved’s Microhomes Village; try some spiritual practices; write a UU elevator speech and a spiritual autobiography; chat with the ministers; journal; and do some credo development.
- Mentor meet-ups: Mentors joined the group in class once a month, and before many of those, we hosted a mentor/ee “UU coffeehouse” for the pairs to have some dedicated time together. Bonus: one mentor/youth pair spearheaded a pancake breakfast during one of the coffeehouses. Mentors also arranged small group meet-ups on their own: bowling, muffin making, attending youth extra-curriculars, and more.
- UU Asheville youth retreat at The Mountain (January): An (optional) 4th retreat with YRUU. See YRUU section for details.
- Winter retreat (February): This is when the credo formation seeds are planted in earnest. The facilitators, youth, and mentors gathered on campus for the (always included) fun and bonding elements; soul collage (led by one of our UU members--thank you, Joanne Fox!); deep conversation; and of course, games and food.
- Spring retreat (April): This spring tradition for our Coming of Age cohort is a special way to share time and energy in community with their peers and supporting adults - their trusty facilitators and mentors - AWAY from the familiar: their homes and our UU campus. The youth and facilitators headed out for a beautiful get-away at the home of Bruce and Jean Larson in Madison County. (Mentors come out later.) There was time for solitude and reflection; credo sharing; games and bonding; special time and rituals with mentors; celebration; fireside chats; special desserts; and overnight camping. The youth were welcomed back into the Sanctuary Sunday morning with memories and laughter in their hearts--and hopefully also feeling buoyed by our loving UU community.
- Credo creation and Credo Sunday worship service (May): The teens work all year to explore, define, and articulate just what it is they believe and how they can live their values in the world. They are asked to create a credo and share that publicly (if at all possible). In a beloved (almost) annual tradition, the youth present their credos during a special May worship service. At the

time of this writing, that is happening in less than one week! We anticipate being inspired by their messages and appreciate them for sharing their hearts with our congregation.

- Closing ceremony (May): A time for the whole cohort--youth, parents, facilitators, and mentors--to officially mark the end of the CoA year. And you can rightly assume it is a special occasion with space for reflection, ritual, honoring the work of all involved, and celebration!
- Upcoming trip (July): Although they graduate from CoA and the year may be “over” in the school year sense in late May, their journeys continue. They will travel together in July (see the trip section below). We also plan to host some summer fun and connecting points as they join our YRUU high school youth group.

Mentors are a key part of this enriching program. Having a caring adult outside of the parent relationship can be a grounding support to children and youth at any stage of life and why we strive to nurture opportunities for multigenerational connection at UU Asheville. Especially as teens develop more independence, peers and adults outside of their family units become more significant influences than when they were younger. The mentor can be a compassionate guide for a teen and model UU Asheville’s core values of connection, inspiration, compassion, and justice. We UUs know that we all have inherent worth and dignity, but that is sometimes hard for young people (and some adults too) to recognize. The time and energy a mentor spends show the youth that they are valued in this world.



We can be proud that UU Asheville supports the CoAers’ individual and collective journey in their milestone year of faith development. This is a congregation that invests its resources (people/time/energy and funds) to have a strong Coming of Age program. We are tremendously gifted with dedicated adults who volunteer to lead this effort with staff. Thank you to this year’s facilitators (see the top of the section for names, with a nod to Kay Aler-Maida, who launched the year with them by coordinating the opening ceremony). Each youth is also supported by an adult mentor member of the congregation. The mentor team included 10 marvels this year (also see the top of section). Our congregation, these CoA youth, and their families are fortunate to have such dedicated and compassionate volunteers serving in RE. Note: these facilitators and mentors are also more deeply exploring their own beliefs and Unitarian Universalism alongside the CoA teens. This is transformational for more than just the youth!

The youth trip! Seven CoA youth will travel to Pennsylvania in July to the UU Central East Region Summer Institute (CERSI), a week-long multigenerational UU “camp” with dedicated and intentional youth programming as well as many opportunities for all ages activities and learning. It’s a chance for youth and adult chaperones to deepen their connection with fellow UU Asheville travelers, as well as other young people and adults from another region! The week should offer fun and spiritually nourishing opportunities for connection, inspiration, compassion, and justice. This is an experience that simply can’t be created in a sanctuary or Sandburg Hall on a Sunday morning. We look forward to

hearing from them about it! Thanks to Will Smith for joining them as a sponsor/chaperone! (As of this writing, we're still securing another lucky and responsible adult to join them.)



We did change the model and decided to open the historically “CoA trip” to all of our high school youth, inviting our active YRUUers to join the travel experience, too. This gives our youth multiple opportunities for these memorable and faith-deepening experiences during their high school years. We know these trips can offer exponentially greater connection-building experiences. Both for the foundational experience itself and to increase enthusiastic UU faith development throughout high school (and into adulthood). We want to offer more of these off-campus and unique opportunities. There are so many positives to this

approach, including building a more cohesive high school youth group among all the grades, as well as youth having the opportunity for different types of experiences, e.g., service/learning trip with UU College of Social Justice, General Assembly or summer institute, etc. over their high school years. Bonus: a larger pool of travelers can also help with expenses and fundraising, spreading the cost and effort among more families. Unfortunately, no YRUUers can join the trip this year, but we hope that will change in the future as we improve the model and build upon the other ways we bridge the two groups during the year.

Fundraising: “Soup-er Sundays—and other days!” was a classic UU Asheville CoA families fundraising effort with a twist (in continued pandemic times). Rare large group gatherings, definitely not indoors, limited the capacity to hold the traditional monthly Soup Sundays in Sandburg Hall. So, the families innovated! They hosted a drive-up soup service to take home a soup and bread meal to enjoy right away or freeze for a later date several times throughout the year. There was also an on-campus outdoor dining event following the October all-ages worship service. Though some regular customers appreciated the modified soup sales, it was by far a less lucrative fundraising year for this year’s group. We hope it can resume to be more robust in the future, and be able to bring back the always awesome “Big Event” food and entertainment CoA fundraiser. All of these provide wonderful fellowship opportunities for our congregants, as well as provide means to support a youth trip (to bring down the family expense).

One special note: the families donated soup for the pastoral care team to use for meal trains for other congregants. Love that circle in our community!

It’s not all rainbows and unicorns. One big hurdle we all (church and society at large) encountered this year was confidently coming back together after a significant time apart. Waking up our social selves again after a long period of relative shutdown was difficult for many of us. But in the short life of a teen, with changing bodies, minds, and hearts, it’s on a whole other level. Most of them are different in some small or big ways from when they left our UU doors in March 2020. Also, some families completely “checked out” of church during the virtual-only period (no judgment). For youth, in particular, 18 months is a long social gap in their teen years! And some just found their commitment to their faith

development had waned in light of other teen activities and friends (not unusual in normal times, let alone after the pandemic). A drought of 18 months is a big deal for our younger congregants. Although the CoA group had a longer readjustment period in building a cohesive bond this year, it came together for most of the youth. Laughter, friendships, and memories were made that will help carry them forward to their youth trip and beyond into YRUU.

Another hurdle (is always) both normal and heightened youth anxiety, “I’m not getting up there!” about crafting a credo or presenting it publicly. For some, that stems back several years prior when they saw other Coming of Age cohorts sharing their credos in worship. We structure building blocks throughout the year to get them to this point and hope they can willingly share publicly. Staff and facilitators work with individual youth to support other means of credo formation and sharing as needed.



Coming of Age youth at Credo Sunday rehearsal in May 22

We work with youth and families to support their decisions and offer alternatives as they navigate this credo and “coming of age” time of life. At this stage of their development, there is more push and pull happening as they begin to differentiate themselves from their childhood roles. As designed, the Coming of Age program recognizes that and aims to support youth and family decisions in that process. Some choose to withdraw from the program, and that is a valid choice.

We also had a few hiccups with the leadership team. One facilitator had to step away early due to increased family demands, so a new wonderful leader was recruited before the fall retreat. A different facilitator got a new job in Greensboro and had to move mid-year. Fortunately, he wanted to stay connected with the cohort but couldn’t do so at full capacity. In late January, a fabulous fifth facilitator joined the team to help shepherd them through May. We are grateful for all of the facilitators’ time and talents!

YRUU = Young Religious Unitarian Universalists High School Youth Group

Volunteers: Brett Johnson, Langdon Martin, Emily Pegram, and Steven Reines

Staff: Jen Johnson

Our high school youth group, all 11th-12th graders this year (the 9th-10th graders were in CoA), met in person from October-May, with plans to offer some occasional meet-ups over the upcoming summer. We had an early brainstorming “wishes and plans” session with the youth and along with our staff goals, did most of that! We were proud to offer some new and classic adventures and exploration for our older teens to live into our core values of connection, inspiration, compassion, and justice:

Youth (YRUU and CoA) did some work and learning with Rev. Amy Cantrell at the BeLoved Village Microhomes site this fall to help combat housing insecurity in our community.

The group took a hike! On a beautiful fall Sunday morning, they trekked around the Richmond Hill trails while building bonds and exploring our congregational theme to discover and deepen what is holy and sacred to them.

They took a Hood Huggers bus tour with DeWayne Barton to learn more about Asheville's history, present, and future. With a lens on the powerful and resilient African American experience, YRUU learned ways [Hood Huggers](#) is working to make our region sustainable, inclusive, and economically just--and they were invited to participate in that.

Some youths (and their parents) were happy that high schoolers could get some Our Whole Lives (OWL) sessions, a program that fosters healthy sexuality and relationships, including topics of consent, communication, and the digital age. A special nod to OWL-trained Langdon for making this happen!



Annual YRUU-led worship. A very special worship service was crafted and presented by YRUU on February 27. We hope you were able to attend this creative and original worship service. If not, you can catch the re-run here. It is not one to miss! The group started brainstorming and planning it at their youth retreat in January and spent the next two months writing the original “play” and working on all the parts and details. This is always a huge effort. Tremendous hats off to a one-of-a-kind service

to the whole crew involved: youth (May, Nick, Nora, Sydney), all four advisors, and some other special actors and musicians. Repeat: watch now if you haven't already or view it again!

YRUU hosted a blood drive this spring, conceived and executed by youth Nora Oakes, with solid support from a few UU adults and staff, Julie Ransom, YRUU advisor Emily Pegram, and Rev. Claudia Jiménez.

They played, laughed, conversed, created...and so much more! It was good to be together again and discover what they can do.

The youth group also did some special things to build connections within the UU Asheville community: Continuing a tradition initiated last year, the group made 11 care packages for our YRUU alum--recent "UU homegrown" high school graduates and college students. This initiative is a way to a) send love to our young adults and show that their UU faith home is here for them; b) continue the circle and connection between former and current YRUUers (it becomes a tradition that new grads can look forward to and remember when they provided that for their older UU pals), and c) encourage UU participation wherever the emerging adults are now. We received a few thank yous from the young adult recipients appreciating the UU love, "I just wanted to reach out to the YRUU class to say thank y'all SO much for the care package! It made my day. I especially loved the brownies and the social justice stretch :) I just got a coffee with the gift card to power through some studying! You all are so appreciated! Hope you are all doing well, - H." And two handwritten notes [here](#).

Youth offered a "day of service" auction item for the UU Asheville auction. They'll be doing yard work for the lucky bidder in late May.

A session about "Life after high school" with a special guest Riah, a former UU Asheville youth and now a college senior. She Zoomed in with our youth to talk about the future as a young adult, faith/spiritual support, Q&A, and more. It was a great conversation with her sharing her fond memories and highlights of her years growing up in our congregation, as well as showing how faith development can continue in your young adult years.

Venny Zachritz, Membership Coordinator, led a session on membership with youth to help them discover what it means to be a member of UU Asheville and invited them to join.

Connecting to CoA : Intentionally working this year to build a bridge between our two high school groups, CoA and YRUU, we initiated some new traditions and celebrations to foster their connection and incorporate some meaningful rituals. These offer opportunities for group bonding, youth leadership, and strengthening the commitment to participate beyond Coming of Age. Still, in our growing years, we're finding small and big ways to engage our youth. Those seeds we're planting will hopefully have a long-term impact on their lives. Our active YRUUers were instrumental in advancing the initiatives through their willingness to execute some new efforts. Kudos to Nick, Sydney, and Nora!

- The youth retreat at The Mountain (read more about in the next section).
- YRUUers surprised the CoA youth at their spring retreat. YRUU hosted a game for the group, delivered the special "gutter" sundae, and shared "pearls of wisdom" to the CoAers about credos and more while enjoying some youth time around the fire.
- YRUU shared some special words for the Coming of Age graduates during the credo Sunday service.
- They plan to do a special invite to welcome the newest YRUUers (CoA cohort) to the group this summer. We started this in 2020 and hope it is a meaningful way to initiate community building for the newly expanded group.
- The youth trip opportunity. While no YRUUers are traveling this year, we are hopeful for the future. We have already decided what the trip experience will be for next year and can build enthusiasm and investment after this year's (hopefully successful) trip!

Youth retreat at The Mountain for CoA and YRUU: (Side note: although we called it a youth retreat, adult advisors were connecting, growing, and learning, too!)

Rev. Claudia Jiménez presented the idea in the fall, and we got to work on it right away. Our adult leaders were immediately on board, and it rolled from there. Especially, because the usual fall Mountain youth CONference was canceled, this was a special opportunity to connect and grow together as a UU Asheville group. We invited both YRUU and CoA cohorts, allowing a unique and memorable way to bridge the two groups together. Because the grades sometimes parallel each other for a few years before YRUU, we believe this can be a way to foster bonds and thus, generate more interest and comfort to remain connected in youth activities at church after they graduate from CoA. Although we initially had 14 youth and eight adults register, three youth had to cancel last minute because of COVID exposure or other family emergencies. We are sorry they couldn't join us but thank them for caring for the health of our community! (Negative tests were required by all participants before going.)



There were connections made. Some comments included:

- "Having a novel 'COVID Bubble' was neat. With everyone having had a recent negative test, it allowed for a sense of security, and thereby connection, that has been missing. On Sunday, we held hands and sang Long Time Sun. I had goosebumps--knowing how long it had been, and how long it will probably be, before doing that again." - advisor
- "I didn't know you before this weekend, but I'm really glad you came because you had a lot of interesting things to say." - youth, about another youth during a session
- "I, for one, had a wonderful time, and I am pretty sure that is a common sentiment." - advisor
- "It was an AMAZING trip, I think across the board." - advisor
- "I know I haven't been to church in a really long time, but it's been just really great getting to see everybody again." - youth
- "I haven't seen (my kid) this happy in a very long time." - parent, at pick up
- ...(youth) made multiple friends this weekend." - advisor

While staff did the bulk of the planning and coordination for this first-ever(?) special event, we had an amazing team of volunteers to implement our UU Asheville youth retreat. They led all the activities, and most were "chaperoning" the youth and sharing cabins (read: not much sleep for some). They are willing, flexible, positive, fun, safe, and trusted advisors. These adults bring different attributes and skills to the youth advisor role, and special events like this are a key to the recruitment of any team, especially

working w/ youth. I am incredibly grateful for the adult travelers, the majority of our YRUU advisors, CoA facilitators, and one CoA mentor: Brett Johnson, Emily Pegram, Langdon Martin, Steven Reines, Allen Currens, Brian Daniel, Lisa Forehand, and Mame Fleming. We are super grateful to these eight leaders; it could not have happened without them!



Activities included: games and bonding activities; an “OWL adjacent” session on body image; zentangles spiritual and mindfulness activity; YRUU planning their youth-led worship service for our congregation in February; trivia; Mountain rituals; singing, playing, and eating; an indoor snowball fight; free time; hiking; and more.

In all, 19 UU Asheville youth were deepening their peer and multigenerational connections; living compassionately with and for each other; exploring their faith in new ways; having fun; becoming braver and blossoming; facing challenges...by all reports, it was an amazing weekend.

Very different from simply sending youth to attend a Mountain-run CON, we put financial, staff, and volunteer resources to make this happen. We coordinated the housing, facilities, registration, and fee details. We were responsible for all activities. While it was time-consuming to launch an endeavor like this for the first time (especially), we think it was a valuable experience this year.

Special Anecdota

- Some youth shared that they commented on UU Principles in their college applications!
- We had a core of three to four youth who consistently attended Sunday youth group, with a few others dropping in occasionally. Church life is not always priority #1 for busy high schoolers (jobs, more intense school or extracurricular roles). Parents don't necessarily require it anymore. And the perpetual cycle challenge: parents have shared that their teen is reluctant to come because “No one comes.” Also, email is not the best way to reach most teens, but UUA safety guidelines suggest avoiding many popular social media tools. The Remind app and email were requested by youth on a youth poll. We also encouraged youth to reach out to their peers (which they did), and staff made individual and small group outreach to encourage participation along with the mass communication blasts. Those who do attend remain strongly connected with each other and their advisors.
- To foster connection and faith development in other ways (outside our walls) to a wider youth audience, staff sends spiritual nourishment and social justice-related happenings and learnings to YRUU youth and families, whether or not they are officially registered in RE. Examples: [JUUST Breathe](#), a youth ministry [podcast](#); Side w/ Love “30 Days of Love” campaign; UUCSJ’s “World’s Youth for Climate Justice;” and UU sponsored events like, “Environmental Injustice: Race, Class, & Climate Change” with William J. Barber III. Some of our youth aren’t participating at church regularly but are plugged into justice issues through other avenues. Providing them with the

knowledge that justice is a UU thing too can be a bridge to their faith life now and/or in the future.

- We will be honoring (at least) five seniors in a Bridging Ceremony during the May 22 Faith Development themed worship service.
- The volunteer advisors requested staff continue the “lesson” planning for them to execute. That has largely been the case these past two years. We don’t use a set curriculum for YRUU, which allows better flexibility and special activities (field trips, current happenings, membership class, worship planning, etc.). We had so much we wanted to do together, it’s hard to fit in all of it! Going forward, I hope to elicit more volunteer assistance with this. Special thanks to Langdon, an always steady and organized leader, and primary communicator.

Our Whole Lives

Volunteers: Langdon Martin, Emily Pegram, Dan Phairas, and Deb Turner

Staff: Kim Collins

OWL is back at UU Asheville! OWL is a comprehensive sexuality education program created in partnership by the UUA and UCC. It is one of our most popular programs for children and youth at UU Asheville, but it is taking us longer to get back up to pre-pandemic levels because of the nature of the material and the need for specially trained volunteer facilitators. We were able to offer Senior High OWL this year for our 11th & 12th-grade kids because of the dedication of Langdon Martin, assisted by Emily Pegram. They did one to two sessions per month, including an open session for all youth at the Youth Retreat in the winter. Our 21-22 group of 8th graders were able to get a taste of OWL with Kim (assisted by Dan and Deb) offering some “OWL adjacent” sessions from the middle school curriculum. Those kids will likely be participating in COA next year and will not be able to participate in OWL, so we wanted to make sure that we were able to offer a place for them to learn and ask some questions before entering high school.

In-person OWL training has finally resumed, so we were able to get Wendy Fletcher trained to be a future OWL facilitator. We are planning to offer middle school OWL for 7th & 8th graders (26 sessions) as well as elementary OWL for 4th & 5th graders next year. Kim is also working with other local churches to possibly offer an additional middle school class for youth from other congregations and the community.

Other Faith Development worship service May 22. As of this writing, we are looking forward to bringing you a wonderful service with child dedication; mindfulness, and meditation; youth, parent, young adult, and RE leader reflections; music from a young participant and our choir; recognition of our high school seniors and Bridging Ceremony; and more!

Youth Leadership. Some of our high schoolers showed enthusiasm, maturity, and leadership to support justice/action projects. Connected a youth liaison (Nick) with adult UU partners on the BeLoved village project. Nora led the blood drive effort and is the youth liaison to the UU Asheville winner of the “YRUU service for a day” auction item. Katie and a UU (Board) member are in discussion about initiating a 5k as a fundraiser for BeLoved. Additionally, as noted in the YRUU section, some of our seniors have taken leadership in other ways. Exciting to be growing youth leadership (essentially from ground zero).

Leading/participating in worship (big ones = YRUU in February and CoA in May) are traditional ways we invite youth to lead. Percent leadership varies from year to year based on interest and capacity. This year, the YRUU service had a good investment from the youth. I also reached out a few ways to garner

interest in youth leadership in other worship services, e.g., youth worship associate role, but unfortunately heard crickets.

Volunteer appreciation. Thank you, RE Council, for helping us recognize and honor our dedicated RE volunteers. We are proud to serve our families and young congregants, and we couldn't do it without all of you!

Young adult support has lightly grown over the past couple of years. In addition to the care packages, staff periodically shares young adult resources and networks with some of our recent high school grads and other UU young adults. YARN: Young Adult Revival Network; JUUst Breathe podcast; [UU Wellspring](#) are some examples. Additionally, Jen reconnected with a former UU Asheville youth (she goes to college elsewhere, and her family moved out of state several years ago) via a cold call to our office. The young adult inquired about her potential career choice as a religious professional, so Jen has helped foster connections to UU and professional organizations. She also Zoomed in with our YRUUers during a spring session to share about young adult life. Young adult ministry is something our congregation hasn't been keenly attuned to and currently lacks resources for, but it offers a great growth opportunity!

Family Ministry

Volunteers: Jen Oversmith, Deanna Banks, Nora Carpenter, Anna Martin, Sandra Goodson, Nancy Perna, and Amy Glenn

Staff: Kim Collins, Rev. Claudia Jiménez

One of the lessons we have learned over the last two years is that how we connect with families is changing. We have learned that while many families are looking for a traditional "church" experience of having kids in RE classes every Sunday while adults attend worship, we also have many families who are not looking to commit to multi-session classes or groups and just want to be able to connect with less rigidity. We also know that kids who grow up attending worship are more likely to become adults who are connected to spiritual communities. We want church to be a happy, inquisitive, welcoming place for children, youth, and their families. So, how do we offer everything that everyone could possibly want for their family? One way we are trying to meet people where they are is by making our Sanctuary more friendly to children. Inspired by Grace Lutheran Church in Minnesota, we set out to make our worship space friendly and inviting for everyone.

While we have long said that we are welcoming to families with children, our sanctuary did not reflect that until now! Our sanctuary now includes a welcoming space upfront for families with young children. There are cozy seating options, child-sized furniture, soft toys, books, and plenty of coloring supplies--featuring a UU kids activity book and Seven Principles coloring cards. We will still have our classic options for all ages, including mandala coloring sheets and colorful pipe cleaners to keep hands busy while we listen to and watch the worship service. Unlike the cushions that we have used in the past, this new area is permanent and will always be there. We will still be offering Religious Exploration groups for children and youth at the same time as our Sunday morning worship service, but all children and youth are always welcome to attend the worship service with their families at any time. We will also continue to strive to offer an all-ages-friendly service at least once per month when we will not offer additional RE classes during the service. While we are still learning to all be together in the sanctuary (the kids have no complaints!), all of the feedback that we have received from children and their parents has been positive. This space also facilitates family being together in worship--important now more than ever as we adjust to being around other people after spending much of the last two years isolated in our households.

Another way that we are welcoming to families with a variety of needs is by offering monthly (mostly) Family Ministry events for the whole congregation as well as some just for families with younger children. Many of these events were also great opportunities for our Coming of Age group to sell soup to raise funds for a summer trip. Here are some highlights:

- In October, a worship team (Rev. Claudia, Nancy Bragg, and Kim Collins) crafted an all-ages Remembrance Service outside on our steps! Everyone was invited to bring a chair, put on a costume, and join us in the parking lot for a lovely service about remembering our loved ones. There was plenty of candy and treats for our furry friends as well!
- In December, some of our fabulous volunteers planned and hosted an ornament-making and holiday tree decorating party that also included a (COVID safe) cookie exchange. We had folks of all ages spreading the holiday cheer.
- It was cold in Asheville on Sunday, January 30, but our hearts and hands were warm as we gathered on a snowy campus to enjoy a hot cocoa and tea bar, a fire in our new fire pit, and yummy soup from our CoA group. We had great turnout from the whole congregation for this fun event, which may become an annual tradition!
- UU Asheville families had a blast when we got together for an afternoon of bowling in March. Children and youth from grades Pre K-7 gathered along with their parents. We ate too many cheese sticks and drank too much soda but had a fun time connecting with each other in a fun and slightly competitive way.
- Also in March, we launch a monthly family event that invites families to come to UU Asheville on a weeknight evening for pizza, a mindfulness activity led by Amy Glenn, and Board games! We want to give families an easy mid-week option for connection. We'll take a hiatus over the summer but plan to pick right back up in the fall!
- We'll finish up this year with the annual Faith Development service. An all-ages service that will include worship participants of all ages and several milestone acknowledgments, including Senior Bridging and a Child Dedication. We'll have music and movement and celebrate all the work and wonderful things we've done this year in Faith Development.



RE Staff also facilitated a group for parents that met monthly on Zoom for parents wanting to explore how to raise anti-racist kids and how to prepare them to live in a diverse world, even though they may not currently experience much diversity. This group grew from a parent book study group that met in Summer 2020 to read [Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America](#) by Jennifer Harvey. Jen was the original staff facilitator but turned things over to Kim for 21-22 when the group voted to become a closed covenant-style group. We used a shared list of resources, and parents took turns choosing a resource and then facilitating discussion. We had a guest speaker, local educator Betts Conti, share her Hidden Asheville presentation with us. We learned about the history of Black Asheville

as well as the history of slave owners in Western North Carolina. Other members of the congregation were invited and did join us for this presentation.

Pastoral Care

The Family Ministry also includes pastoral care for families with children and youth. RE staff are often the first ones to find out when families are experiencing challenges, so we are often the ones that listen to parents who just need to talk. We also provide resources for grief and other tough topics as well as make meals or put together care packages for parents and children. We are frequently the ones who “rally the troops” by getting the word out to other UU Asheville families so they can help care for the folks in our community. Our children frequently make cards for people in the hospital, and we’ve made banners and other art welcoming people home from the hospital. Having a community to depend on when you need help is one of the things that brings people to church, and it is one of the most beautiful ways that we are together in a community.



Staff Development

- Kim Collins, Religious Educator
 - Kim completed the Family Ministry Renaissance Module, a six-week course offered by the UUA for religious educators and other professionals. This helped inform our expansion of Family Ministry. It was her fifth Ren Mod, which means that she has completed 75 hours of training for religious educators. She was awarded a pin and certificate from the UUA and was recognized in front of the congregation in March. She also participated in a covenant group for religious educators working with the anti-racism materials in the Soul Matters packets, discussing how they were implemented and providing feedback to the creators.

- Jen Johnson, Religious Educator
 - Jubilee Three Anti-Racism Training: Learning Together About Systemic Racism, Acclaimed Program, June 3-5, 2022.
 - 8th Principle Event w/ Paula Cole Jones April 3, 2022.
 - LE (Leadership Experience) Primer from the Southern Region. March 2022.
 - LREDA White Caucus Anti-Racist small group monthly beginning Feb. 2022
 - Youth Mental Health First Aid training and certification. January 2022. (paper notes and digital slides, notes, certificate, etc. here. Asynch study + 2 live training sessions.
 - Soul Matters *Widening the Circle* Webinar August 27, 2021. De-centering whiteness in RE programs.
 - LREDA 2 brown bags re: reopening and hybrid RE. August 4 and 18, 2021.

- RE-UUp: Conversations on Re-opening for Religious Education Programs. August 3, 2021.

The Mountain Gathering

Planning Committee: Chairperson (retiring): Kristi Miller; Chair-people in training: Joanne Fox, Anna Martin, Sandra Goodson

Members: Adam Griffith – childcare; Anna Martin – Rules and regulations; Cecil Bennett; Myrtle Staples; Larry Wheeler; Nancy Heath; Mariah Wright (Housing); Monica Youngman; Sarah Hargroves (Music in the past); John Bloomer; Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

About 90 folks gathered at the Mountain in October of 2021 to enjoy a weekend of workshops, good food, lovely weather, and social interaction. The highlight of the weekend was the pumpkin carving led by The Ransoms. After carving the pumpkins, they were driven up to the top and set alight for all to enjoy as the sunset on Saturday evening. We had marshmallows, scary stories, fairy houses, yoga, dance, jewelry making, and more! The Sandburgers delighted us with their music and Paul as always gave us some wonderful piano music for show tunes. Revs. Claudia and Cathy gave us some wonderful inspiration around the campfire and we even managed a blackout on Friday evening.

Submitted by Kristi Miller, outgoing chairperson, The Mountain Gathering

Good Grief Group

Our UU Asheville Good Grief Group (GGG) meets monthly to offer a safe and sacred space to grieve our losses, which encompass losses from jobs to health to loved ones to collective grief in the world. Anyone who participates in our congregation is welcome to try this group. As we talk about our grief, we are held and heard by each other. This year, we averaged six grieverers on 2nd Fridays from 9:30 am - 11 am. Members of our GGG helped lead October's Remembrance Service, where we remembered loved ones who have died as well as December's When Holidays Hurt Service, where we let go of heaviness and created space for lightness.

Submitted by Nancy Bragg and Sherry Lundquist, co-facilitators, Good Grief Group

Adult Faith Exploration

Adult Faith Development Planning Team: John Bloomer, Kim Collins, Sherry Lundquist, Jim Steffe, Linda Topp, Kelly Wedell, and Rev. Claudia Jiménez.

The planning team met monthly to coordinate weekly Wednesday Vespers and programs. The team decided to keep vespers programs online due to the COVID variants and safety concerns. Programs were offered weekly from September to April and will resume in September.

This year Wednesday programs had weekly themes:

- First week: Discussion on the monthly theme
- Second week: Liberation conversations providing updates on the work of the Racial Justice Advisory Council (RJAC) and facilitating conversations on anti-racism and liberation. Led by various members of RJAC.
- Third week: Spiritual practices including meditation, centering love, zentangles, and hiking/walking as a spiritual practice led by members.

- Fourth week: Theological reflection led by Rev. Claudia Jiménez including themes such as eco-theology, evil, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It provided space for covenanted, vulnerable, and thought-provoking conversations about how our UU Principles and values guide our understanding and behaviors related to these themes.



Other non-Wednesday programs included a *Widening the Circle* book study facilitated by Mary Alm, a dream group series facilitated by Rev. Terry Davis, “Create and Connect” circles facilitated by local artist Ginger Huebner, a monthly Drumming Circle coordinated with Les Downs, and a Spirited Improv series facilitated by Rev. Jade Angelica.

Spiritual Deepening Groups

Small Group Ministry

Coordinators: Venny Zachritz, Ann Perry, Rev. Claudia Jiménez

During the summer, the coordinators revised the *Small Group Ministry Handbook* and organized an August training for facilitators. The name change from Covenant Groups to *Soul Matters* Groups was announced at the training and to the congregation via the *eNews*. There are nine *Soul Matters* Groups. These groups follow the *Soul Matters* format and meet monthly from September-August and disband. New groups are formed in the fall. One group explored the theme using art and was called Creativity Matters.

Three small groups that may or may not use the *Soul Matters* materials and do not disband are called Legacy Groups.

Our small group ministry serves approximately 85 people creating a covenanted space for connection, deep listening, and exploration. Thank you to this year’s facilitators: Nancy Bragg, James Cassara, James Gamble, David Garver, EJ Haack, Iris Hardin, Gay Lambirth, Neal Jones, Nancy Perna, Marta Reese, Bob Wilson, and Rev. Claudia Jiménez.

Covenant of UU Pagans (CUUPS)

Like most groups, this year has been challenging for Blue Ridge Spirit CUUPS due to COVID restrictions. We had to choose several times whether to hold a public ritual with masks and social distancing or if we were more comfortable with canceling the ritual. In 2021, our public rituals included Summer Solstice and Lughnasa in Grove Park, with about 20 people attending each ritual. We made a group decision to cancel our public ritual for Mabon (September) and Samhain (October). We held an indoor public ritual for Yule, fully masked, which was well attended and very festive. In 2022, we resumed public rituals for Ostara in April and Beltane on May 1, with about 30 people in attendance. We are hoping to continue our public rituals this coming year.

In planning for the coming year, several areas in which we would like to expand are education about the Pagan path (a speaker series or a movie), purchasing a canvas portable labyrinth in conjunction with the UU Asheville, holding a “yard sale” for ritual items, and inclusion into church services and Wednesday

night programs. We are also looking forward to participating in UU drum circles and possibly leading some drum circles.

We are grateful to UU Asheville for their support and cooperation as we move forward with new and exciting plans for celebrating the earth-based holidays and being a part of the UU worship services. We welcome all to our circle.

Submitted by Sherry Lundquist and Maryann Somerville

UU Sangha Disbanding

UU Sangha was organized as a covenantal style faith development group created for those “interested in developing and strengthening their UU-Buddhism connection in the context of everyday life.” After meeting (via Zoom) twice a month for one year, we found that our membership numbers were insufficient to keep the group active. For those who attended, it was a great year of leaning into our Buddhist practice with the added benefit of rich discussions. Our last meeting was on March 9, 2022.

NOTE: As of this writing, a small group is surveying the congregation to gauge interest in reconvening the sangha.

Submitted by Jim Steffe

Worship

This year I was intentional about exploring collaborative worship crafting various services with a team such as an outdoor Remembrance Service with Kim Collins and Nancy Bragg; Faith Development Sunday Service with Kim Collins and Jen Johnson; Spirited Improv service with Rev. Jade Angelica and Sandra Goodson and The Beloved Community & the 8th Principle service with Nancy Bragg and Anna Olsen. I also crafted a service on the Promise of UUism using haikus submitted by members of the congregation. In every service, I have been grateful for the collaboration with our music director, Les Downs.



Dressed up for the Remembrance Service. Who are we?

Justice Ministry

Justice Ministry Council

Members: Nancy Bragg (spiritual grounding); Bernise Lynch (LGBTQ+/Gender Justice); Deb Holden (UUSC); Ed Prestemon (Environmental Justice); Carol Buffum (Anti-racism/Immigration Justice); Linda Kooiker (Community Plate); Amy Moore (UU the Vote); Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

The council met monthly to coordinate activities, learn about justice issues, and support justice work within the congregation. A highlight of our work together was participation in UU the Vote coordinated by team captain Amy Moore. She kept the council and congregation informed of justice events such as redistricting workshops, the 8th Principle webinar, and the weekly Zoom Action Hour coordinated by our partner UU Justice Ministry North Carolina (UUJMNC). In March, 40 UU Asheville volunteers sent 2,000 postcards to voters in Union County, NC, encouraging them to vote. In June, the council will be

viewing and discussing the presentation “Transgender Justice & Inclusion” organized by UUJMNC. Amy has served as team captain liaising with UUJMNC for over two years. She will be leaving the council this year. We are actively looking for a team captain to replace her as team captain. Thank you, Amy, for your service!

The council held a visioning retreat in April to plan for the new year and welcome prospective members. The following vision and goals were identified:

- Vision: Justice Ministry Council supports the justice ministry of the congregation.
- Goals:
 - Organize Reflection Circles to provide accountability and support justice work as a spiritual practice.
 - Facilitate building bridges between the congregation and the wider community.
 - Provide educational opportunities (e.g., training on four areas of justice work (advocacy, witness, education, service)); workshops on justice-related topics and community justice issues (e.g. reparations, homelessness).
 - Coordinate internal (congregation: *eNews*, Facebook, website) and external (community & UUA) publicity.

Racial Justice Advisory Council (RJAC)

Members: Noah Hall, Eleanor Lane, Melissa Murphy, Ed Prestemon, and Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison)

In April, the council completed a final report to the Board after holding numerous listening circles and documenting congregational responses, suggestions, and concerns about the congregational assessment results and analysis. The tool assessed where congregants believed UU Asheville was on the journey of being an anti-racist congregation.

Prior to submitting the final report to the Board, I continued to meet with our accountability partner, Tracey-Greene Washington, to receive feedback on our work. Members of the committee also met with the Board during their monthly meeting to keep them updated on our progress.

In May, RJAC met with the Board to discuss the report before the committee disbanded. Major takeaways from that meeting were:

1. Pursuing the 8th Principle will place UU Asheville on the path of completing the report recommendations;
2. An audit of policies, procedures, and our governance model should be a top priority;
3. Accountability for following through on the recommendations will be important. What that will look like is to be determined;
4. Communication and transparency will be important for congregational engagement and support.

Whew! What powerful work we get to do. It will challenge and stretch us and even make us feel uncomfortable. And it will move us closer to liberation and uprooting white supremacy culture.

New Justice Initiatives

BeLoved Asheville Pantry & Auction

About a year ago, I volunteered to go to a meeting with BeLoved Asheville to learn more about them and to bring back what I learned to Rev. Claudia Jiménez/UU Asheville so that we could perhaps explore ways to partner with BeLoved. I remember telling Rev. Claudia Jiménez that my only commitment was to gather information...that I was not volunteering for anything else. So, I attended the meeting via Zoom and my life was shaken up!!! As I listened to Rev. Amy Cantrell, a BeLoved Asheville co-Director, tell the story of how BeLoved Asheville came to be and how it lives its mission, I knew right away that what was being revealed to me was how I could live my faith. By the end of the meeting, I had my list of friends I wanted to invite to explore with me.



Anita Feldman said yes, and over the next months, oversaw UU Asheville members and friends establishing a Street Pantry located on Charlotte Street and coordinated 60 volunteers (UU Asheville members and friends) to keep the pantry stocked. It is the first of the 15 BeLoved pantries in Buncombe County that has been adopted by an outside organization, and the first that has been made into a painted work of art by young community artist Jamie Morris. UU member Jensen Gelfond organized a Charlotte Pantry Google Group so that all the volunteers can easily communicate with each other about the types of supplies most needed, substitute needs, and any other issues. Thanks to Anita Feldman and Jim Gamble for continued leadership, and the 60 volunteers who have generously made this an ongoing project.

Jim Gamble said yes and became the UU Asheville liaison with the BeLoved Village project manager. He coordinated a Work Day with many UU Asheville teens and looks forward to

coordinating more projects around the construction of the homes in the BeLoved Village when we are called to do so by BeLoved Asheville.

Nancy Gamble said yes and joined me on an odyssey of planning an auction to benefit the building of one home for BeLoved Village. With Rev. Amy's help, we recruited committee members from other faith organizations including St. Mathias, All Souls Church, and the Jewish Secular Community of Asheville. We quickly named ourselves the RAH (Raise A Home) Committee. We were coming from different places in more ways than one, but we were in lockstep about our mission, and as we grew to know each other, we saw that we each had talents and skills that were essential to pull this off, and we did it! We sold out, had over 300 guests, and made \$25,000 over our goal, netting just over \$120,000! The 2nd annual Raise A Home Auction will be May 6, 2023--mark your calendars!

Special thanks go to Anita Feldman, Michael Majewski, Jim Gamble, Fredda Mangel, & Reed Olszack for their help leading up to the event & for help during the event.

Submitted by Margaret McAlister, with Anita Feldman

Circle of Welcome for Afghan Refugees

Co-chairs: Katie Winchell and Sharon LeDuc

In early January, the Lutheran Services Carolinas set up an office in Asheville to welcome up to 100 Afghan refugees and offered groups of volunteers the opportunity to form Circles of Welcome for the arriving refugees.

In mid-January, we learned from an email to the A-RIJAG group that an Afghan family was arriving within days and didn't have a Circle of Welcome to support them. Katie Winchell proceeded to correspond with Rev. Claudia Jiménez and Sharon LeDuc about forming a Circle of Welcome supported by UU Asheville for this family. Sharon offered to co-lead a Circle with Katie Winchell for the incoming family. Rev. Claudia Jiménez sent out an Action Alert to inform UU Asheville members & friends about the need to support this family and how to join the Circle.

During the Spring of 2022, our Circle (consisting of over 35 members & friends of UU Asheville) provided food, cooking utensils, quilts, transportation for shopping and medical appointments, and friendship to a family of four, who have been resettled in the Asheville area. We continue to work on their behalf, seeking donations of furniture and other needs as they find more permanent housing. Our efforts have been supported by monetary donations to the UU Asheville Immigration Justice fund.

Justice Action Groups

Anti-Racism and Immigration Justice Annual Report

The Anti-Racism and Immigration Justice Action Group (A-RIJAG) worked closely with Rev. Claudia Jiménez who actively reached out to our group for inclusion in many anti-racism and immigration justice opportunities and activities within the congregation, including worship. We met monthly via Zoom. We supported the efforts of the Racial Justice Advisory Council and look forward to actively contributing to UU Asheville's efforts to adopt the 8th Principle and become an anti-racist congregation.

We recreated our meeting covenant and began a discussion on mission, vision, and possible name change.

A-RIJAG and its members supported various activities most notably:

- Led and organized small groups (Dismantling White Supremacy Support Group, and Me and White Supremacy Reflection Groups)
- Worked under Rev. Claudia Jiménez's leadership to bring anti-racism discussions and information in varied formats (Vespers, after-vespers conversations, Social Justice Sunday service), provided recommendations of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations to Community Plate and delivered Faith-in-Action testimonials during Sunday Service. Members also participated in numerous other UU Asheville committees bringing an equity lens in many antiracist and immigration justice community organizations.
- Members Eleanor Lane and Ed Prestemon were on the Racial Justice Advisory Council (RJAC), and A-RIJAG members supported RJAC's work by reviewing the glossary, facilitating post-vespers Liberation discussions, promoting participation in the survey and post-survey discussions, and pledging support for RJAC recommendations and BOT directives coming from these recommendations.
- Our members serve the congregation as UU Asheville community organization liaisons for Faith4Justice, CoThinkk, and Faith Communities Organizing for Sanctuary (FCOS), reporting activities to the Justice Ministry Council.

The role of liaison is loosely defined, and it was decided this year that individual members of Faith4Justice and CoThinkk would pay their own 'dues', and UU Asheville would not maintain an institutional membership. Discussion is ongoing on how UU Asheville as an entity will show up in these groups.

Communities Organizing for Sanctuary (FCOS) was meeting sporadically during the pandemic. A-RIJAG, UU Asheville joined with other congregations to support Maria in renewing her asylum application and offer other support. In February 2022, Katie Winchell and Sharon LeDuc became co-leaders of UU Asheville's team.

Welcome Circle supported an Afghan refugee family of four. Thirty-plus members of UU Asheville have contributed their time and resources to this effort. Katie is again working with FCOS and Lutheran Services as 100+ Afghans are being welcomed in the Asheville area.

Other A-RIJAC work:

- A-RIJAG endorses the 8th Principle. Members attended webinars on the subject and have a member going to planning workshops and pledges to support the work necessary to bring this through the approval process.
- Our members serve on Other UU Asheville committees, bringing an intersectional equity lens: Justice Ministry Council, Community Plate, Racial Justice Advisory Council, Board of Trustees, Environmental Action, URU, and others.
- Our members have attended various UU- and community-led webinars for informational and possible future participation purposes: 8th Principle, restorative practices, Living Pledge, etc.
- UU Asheville was a co-sponsor (via invite thru A-RIJAG) of an ACLU webinar, "Achieving Racial Equity in North Carolina's Legal System" in November 2021. A-RIJAG provided two follow-up reflection Zoom sessions to UU Asheville.

submitted by Carol Buffum

Community Plate Annual Report

Chair: Linda Kooiker

Members: Brenda Robinson, Cheryl Perry, Donna Robinson, Ed Prestemon, Marianne Newman, and Rusty Bryant. Rev. Claudia Jiménez (staff liaison).

Community Plate (CP) functions as part of UU Asheville's social justice philanthropy group. Congregational members can nominate an organization. The CP team evaluates these applications and decides which organizations will be recipients of CP funds. Recently, we revised the CP guidelines to make them more inclusive and to indicate our support of organizations serving and being led by People of the Global Majority. Thus, we are funding some of our local grassroots organizations. These organizations are doing work in Asheville and Buncombe County. Members of the congregation are encouraged to educate themselves about each organization and to volunteer if possible.

During this church year, we have funded: Solarize Asheville-Buncombe, Bountiful Cities, Ministers' Discretionary Fund, Mel Hetland Scholarship, HERS, and CoThinkk. The total collected as of April 30 was \$11,000.

Submitted by Linda Kooiker

Denominational Affairs

November 14 was the launch Sunday for Guest At Your Table. Rev. Cathy Harrington centered the service on her experiences in Latin America. The response was far less than hoped for. The UUSC connection seemed to be lost. Guest at Your Table received \$295 in contributions, whereas last year, the total was \$1,447, and in 19-20, the total was \$2,293. Membership is now at 10% of the congregation, whereas it had been at about 15%. When church services return to in-person, I am hoping that a presence at the social justice table will instill an interest in UUSC.

A budget request was made for UU Asheville to become a James Luther Adams award winner. The award is for any congregation that contributes one dollar per certified member to UUSC.

I attended the UUSC Roundtable this past March on the situation in Burma one year after the military coup. UUSC has partnered with organizations helping both people in Burma and the refugee camps. They continue to press for human rights in the region. Contributions are now being taken to help the people of Ukraine. UUSC always partners with local groups to help in a crisis.

We continue to have no representation of UUA. One person volunteered to be the liaison, but a personal crisis kept them from continuing. We also continue to give much less than the suggested Fair Share in support of UUA. UU Asheville relies heavily on UUA support for finding candidates for interim and settled minister openings, training our staff, and denominational connections and events. It is my hope that we start to fully support the UUA.

Submitted by Deb Holden

Environmental Action Committee (EAC)

The Earth Community Circle changed its name to the Environmental Action Committee (EAC) this year. This has been a low-key year for the EAC, with the ongoing pandemic shutting down many activities. Despite the pandemic, EAC held monthly meetings throughout the year by Zoom. Ed Prestemon volunteered to be the EAC Liaison to the UU Asheville Justice Ministry Council. A recent survey of our email lists, etc., has indicated our effective membership is 20 as of May 2022.

The UU Asheville 32 kW, 105 solar panel system located on the roof of Sandburg Hall continued generating power throughout 21-22. The table below summarizes the following information for the system from the beginning of operation through May 10, 2022, approximately 34 months:

- Total electricity produced:
- Estimated carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions prevented as compared to an equivalent fossil fuel system
- Estimated equivalent trees planted based on the typical CO₂ absorption level for new trees

Total electricity produced	Estimated emissions prevented	Estimated equivalent trees planted
132,000 kilowatt-hours	205,000 pounds of CO ₂	1,550

The EAC will continue to provide occasional updates on the performance of the UU Asheville solar system. If you have questions about our system or solar systems in general, please contact Dan Clere (danielclere@gmail.com).

The Green Sanctuary Reaccreditation projects are in three focus areas: Environmental Justice, Promoting Netzero Energy, Sustainable Landscapes, and Alternative Transportation. They are continuing at a much slower rate due to the pandemic. All are underway but are projected to need more time to complete.

Ed Prestemon, with the assistance of Grace Curry, prepared and submitted a memo examining UU Asheville grounds maintenance options. This memo suggests that the campus further reduce its carbon footprint and reduce air pollutants by several potential options such as modifying our landscaping to be more sustainable and/or implementing the use of electric lawn maintenance equipment. Kate Jerome has agreed to prepare a proposed master plan for the development of our landscaping and grounds. Wink Zachritz prepared and submitted a signage plan for the development of interpretive signage for the UU Asheville campus entitled, "Environmental Action Committee (EAC) Plan for Environmental Education and Interpretive Signs on the UU Asheville Campus." The plan suggests signs for the pollinator garden (front and rear location), rain garden, rain barrels, plant identification, and the photovoltaic (solar panels) system.

Grace Curry submitted Green Tips to be included in the *eNews* for part of the year. Because few people were reading the Green Tips, we decided that in lieu of the monthly tips, we will propose articles on environmental issues to be included in the *eNews* in the future.

Kate Jerome, Venny Zachritz, and Wink Zachritz met with Professor Hagedorn of Environmental Studies from UNCA to see if his class would be interested in using the UU Asheville campus as a special studies area for permaculture. We are hoping to have a student doing this in the coming year. A big thanks to Ed Prestemon for making this connection.

The EAC signed the *Build Back Fossil Free* letter to President Biden to request that he take executive action on climate justice.

The EAC is sponsoring the BEE City Workshop on Creating a GreenWorks-Certified Pollinator Habitat with Betsy Savely to be held at UU Asheville on May 28, 2022.

The EAC voted to continue supporting the Creation Care Alliance with several members attending events and workshops. Ed Prestemon has agreed to be the liaison with the Creation Care Alliance.

We also support the UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE). The UUMFE has been instrumental to the passage of several denominational social witness statements, including the landmark 2006 Statement of Conscience on the threat of climate change and the 2015 Action of Immediate Witness on acting for a livable climate. Every year, UUMFE has a strong presence at General Assembly, the annual meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). UUMFE is the central leader of the UUA Green Sanctuary Program.

Grace Curry continues to attend the City of Asheville Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure Task Force. This is part of our ongoing efforts under the Green Sanctuary reaccreditation focus area of Alternative Transportation.

Ed Prestemon and Sharon LeDuc volunteered several times with Energy Savers Network (ESN) to perform energy conservation work at the Klondyke apartments as part of ESN's agreement with the Public Housing Authority.

Submitted by Walter (Wink) Zachritz and Ed Prestemon, Co-Chairs

Justice Ministry Film Night

Film Night continued via Zoom in June 2021. Seven films were screened through May 2022. Average monthly attendance started at approximately 40, similar to the prior year, but declined to approximately 30 by May. Attendees were mostly UU Asheville members.

Summary:

- The public mailing list is still approximately 300 households with no significant change.
- No public flyers were posted. When we start back up in person, we will need to determine what public bulletin Boards are available.
- License fees this year have been between \$100 and \$150, unchanged compared with last year.
- Donations are unknown. Attendees were instructed to go on the website if they wished to donate.

The following films were screened:

- *Racially Charged*
- *Denial*
- *Ama'*
- *A Crime on the Bayou*
- *Crossroads Stories*
- *Meltdown in Dixie*
- *Suppressed and Sabotaged 2022, the Fight to Vote*

A poll of recent attendees and the mailing list was taken in March to determine if attendees preferred Zoom, in-person, or no preference. A majority preferred Zoom, with in-person receiving the fewest votes, so we are staying with Zoom for now. There is still considerable COVID concern. A few attendees no longer drive at night, something to consider for the future. We normally get about twice as many requests for the link every month as actually attending the Zoom screenings.

Submitted by Charles Wussow and Iris Williams

Universalist Rainbow Unity (URU)

URU has gone through several changes over the past several years. The departure of the top three 'movers and shakers' of the group was difficult. The pandemic caused the cancelation of our main activities, the Pride Procession and Celebration was difficult as well. Both the loss of energy and the absence of the most energizing event in URU's year left the group in a 'funk'. We struggled with Zoom and had several successful meetings, but with no main activity to focus on, it was, as I said, difficult. Glad to report that the times are changing. The group is growing with four new members and several previous members returning to active status. We have a solid membership base and several exciting activities on our horizon, which foretell a great year ahead.

We do have some good news from the past year. For Trans Remembrance Day, UU Asheville held a candlelight service, and a trans member of the community attended along with members of the congregation. Rev. Cathy Harrington coordinated with Tranzmission (local Transgender organization) regarding our service. There was an attempt to livestream the two groups together, but technical difficulties prevented success.

The service included reading the names and short bios of Transgender people who lost their lives this past year. It was a moving, meaningful service, and we intend to expand it this coming year. Rev. Cathy Harrington then dedicated the following Sunday's service to honoring Transgender people. Ruth Christy read a transgender story during a Time for All Ages. Members of URU met with the Coming of Age (CoA) group after the service for an interactive session, and some members of CoA participated actively.

Ruth Christy was the spark of URU this year. She shared the true story of a non-binary young person at the Time for All Ages during another Sunday Morning service and a Wednesday Vespers the day after Trans Visibility Day.

The group studied the steps for Welcoming Congregation renewal (which is recommended by the UUA). The conclusion was that while we were fulfilling some of the requirements, we had work to do to be a truly Welcoming Congregation and should go through the renewal process. The group also determined that now was not the time to do so and that we needed more support from the general population of the congregation to be successful in that effort. We will continue to take steps towards our Welcoming Congregation renewal.

We are looking forward to and planning for the upcoming webinar, Transgender Justice and Inclusion, with Zr. Alex Kapitan, hosted by UU Justice NC and the SC UU Justice Alliance.

We are beginning work on hosting the Trans Inclusion in Congregations series for the congregation. We are preparing for and looking forward to tabling again with a new large Rainbow flag augmented with a new Progress Flag. We hope to energize the congregation and visitors about UU Asheville growing into a space where QLGBT+ people can become all they can be both spiritually and in all areas of their lives.

Submitted by Bernise A Lynch (they/them), URU facilitator