

State of the Congregation – Annual Report

Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation

January 13, 2019 by Rev. Eric Posa

w/ Bonnie Guyer Graham, Sara Lewis, Rev. Carol McKinley, & Darlene Sarkela

Introduction

Every congregation faces countless challenges, large and small, throughout their histories. It's no secret that this congregation has had a few of its own, awhile back and also in recent years. As I've said before, you are effectively in the 5th year now, of what is usually a 2-year transition. I say that, not to criticize, but to sympathize. It's been hard, and it has not always felt good. Yet through those challenges, OUUC has continued to thrive, and grow. Here's just one indication of that thriving: your official membership number, reported early last year to the national Unitarian Universalist Association, is the highest it's ever been (289). The updated membership number is due on the 1st of next month; unless something unexpected happens in the next couple weeks, that reported number will rise again.

In addition to the traditional roles of a minister – preacher, pastoral caregiver, prophetic social justice proponent – I fill a few other roles here at Olympia UU Congregation. One of these connects with the organizational structure of this congregation, which groups every one of its ministries, programs, and operations – really, everything OUUC does that's not church governance – into 5 Ministry Areas. Each area is overseen by a different OUUC staff member, who we call the “Accountable Person” (AP) for that area. As minister, I chair the AP Team. That is one of the roles in which I report to you today. A second, is as the person functioning in the Executive Role under our governance system, known as Policy Governance©. And, in my role as your Interim Minister, I work with you to facilitate your work to transition into a new ministry and a new future. Thus my report has 3 sections: on the Ministry Areas, on Policy Governance, and on Looking Ahead to your future.

Ministry Areas

For the first time in my ministry career, I'm preaching today was written by multiple people. I did write most of it, and I'll not be plagiarizing; but I did ask each of the Accountable Persons to write a short blurb highlighting the important events in each of their Ministry Areas:

Our Connections Coordinator, Bonnie Guyer-Graham, reports this on the Community Life area: *Our congregation has an active network of social groups welcoming our members and friends. Small Group Dinners had a successful year and are noticing more people want to be alternates and just participate in the dinners occasionally. The Membership team had a busy year. Thanks to Sara Lewis, they rewrote their Membership class curriculum, and now have staff/member teams teaching these classes. This year OUUC welcomed 27 new members.[Mention 289] The Monthly Connection table offering people the opportunity to ask their questions and find out*

about ways to connect has been very busy. And finally, the Membership Team would like to thank Mark Gray for his leadership and support for the last couple years. Mark Gray is stepping down from Membership Chair and would be happy to talk with anyone who would like to help our Membership grow and thrive.

In our Faith Development area, our Director of Lifespan Religious Education, Sara Lewis, reports: *highlights for 2018 include: our first ever youth members choosing to sign the book following the Coming of Age program, the nursery spruce up made possible by a generous Raise the Paddle, the first time we've ever maxed out our registration capacity for Chalice Camp in the summer and also for middle school Our Whole Lives, the on-going success of our drop-in Soul Matters group as well as on-going Covenant Circles, and as always a very popular Adult Education program. While religious education is facing challenges and changes at large, across congregations and denominations, we continue to have wonderful energy and creativity here and are trying lots of fun new things, learning, and growing together.*

Newly-hired at the beginning of last year as OUUC's Faith in Action Coordinator, though certainly not new to the congregation, Rev. Carol McKinley notes: *Faith in Action Ministry has focused on two issues this year: homelessness and sanctuary. Partnering with other faith communities and local government we have worked to support programs and convey the seriousness of the issue to OUUC and the larger community. As part of the Faith Network for Sanctuary, we continue to recruit and train volunteers to support Temple Beth Hatfiloh's physical sanctuary.*

Our Administrator, Darlene Sarkela, describes the work of the Resources Ministry Area this way: *Our skilled and dedicated B&G Committee continued with their efforts to maintain our church home. An ongoing problem with the interior lighting system in the RE wing was resolved. Two church offices got new floor covering. The B&G members were early adopters of Realm software and are using it successfully for communication. Other Resource Ministry accomplishments include updating the website to make it a secure site, introducing a new tool for podcasting, and the creation of an online class for church leaders.*

And, I as your minister serve as Accountable Person for the Spiritual Life Ministry Area. Two notes there: our Worship Arts Team is seeing significant turnover, for various reasons. (One Celebrant moved away, another moved to the Ministerial Search Team, and one stepped down.) But several new members have just joined, so the team remains strong, and soon you will start seeing new faces up here. And our Pastoral Care Team has returned to an earlier model of engaging one another in regular deep check-ins to hone one another's pastoral listening skills, and we've added an additional Care Coordinating meeting to share relevant and appropriate information with other people and groups in the congregation that offer care.

Policy Governance

Now, a couple quick points about Policy Governance. I believe implementation of Policy Governance at OUUC is now at 90%. It may have seemed like slow going – it's always

slow going, for any congregation or organization to implement any governance change. But as of last month's board meeting, we now have a permanent calendar for "monitoring". That means there is now a strict annual schedule for my reporting to the board how we're doing as a congregation in meeting our Ends, and on adhering to the Executive Limitations the board has set, on me and on the operations/ministries of OUUC. This reporting is the mechanism by which I remain accountable to the board, and it's how the board evaluates the minister. That was the last key piece, and it's in place now.

A few details remain: I still have a couple more policies for which to offer "interpretations" (these are operational definitions, that explain which evidence will be given to demonstrate whether we're in compliance with the policies, or if we're out of compliance). The board will be discussing its process for engaging with these monitoring reports at an upcoming work session. The board also began a conversation at a recent Linkage meeting on clarifying and naming the "moral ownership" of the congregation, from whom OUUC derives its authority for ministry & to whom it is accountable. But while these details will flesh out and enrich our governance process, I see no further hindrances to functioning genuinely under Policy Governance.

As for the monitoring process, please remember that we have posted the first Ends Monitoring report online. Please contact me if you would like a copy, but have real difficulty viewing the document online.

Looking Ahead

Now, let's look ahead to 2019. First, a general calendar note. It is very likely that my final Sunday at OUUC will be June 16. It's Father's Day, as it happens; more relevantly, it's the Sunday before **General Assembly (GA)**, the national UUA convention and business meeting. My final formal ministry task for this congregation will be serving as your ministerial delegate to GA. I'm saving up the lion's share of my vacation time, so that as soon as GA ends, we travel from there to whatever city I will live in next, to serve whichever congregation I next agree to serve as interim minister. (And no, I have no idea yet where that will be; I probably won't know until mid-May.) But let me add: this coming year, GA will be here in the state of Washington, specifically in Spokane. I, along with our Leadership Development Committee, encourage as many of our members as possible to attend. It will be the **Wednesday through Sunday of the week after Father's Day, June 19-23.**

About our Ministerial Search Team, I want to state clearly what I have seen, that may be less obvious to our members: this team is doing fabulous work. I have worked closely with them, up to this point, and I admire their cohesiveness, diligence, and dedication to representing this congregation on its best possible terms. Now that they have received names of prospective ministers, I am limiting my engagement with them, as it's not my role to influence the choice of the Search Team. (Though I am still very available to aid them with procedural and process questions, as I'm able.) I pray that your Candidating

Week with the final candidate for your next minister – a set of events currently scheduled for Saturday, April 27 – Sunday, May 5

Instead, I'll raise one final question. We Unitarian Universalists are people of covenant. Here at OUUC, we have a well-established statement of our covenant. How does our covenant call us to engage, to relate to one another? How can we live out its commitment to "speak with each other directly and honestly from a position of respect, kindness and love"? As we prepare to enter a new phase of our ministry, all at OUUC are invited to a **Healthy Congregations Workshop**. Facilitators from the Healthy Congregations Team of the UU Pacific NW District will guide us through an exploration of our OUUC Covenant, and offer tools to support our covenantal relationships. This workshop will be: **Saturday, March 2, 10 AM - 3 PM**. Lunch will be provided, childcare will be offered (we ask that you sign up in advance), and there's no fee for attendance. We hope you will join us.

Conclusion

As I enter my final months with you, I want to express how much my spouse Suzi and I have appreciated our time in Olympia, and how much I have valued my work with OUUC. This is a dynamic and engaged congregation, and I have confidence in my high hopes for your future. I look forward to hearing more about your Unitarian Universalist presence in, and ministry with, the larger Olympia and larger UU communities in years to come.

In faith, Rev. Eric Posa