

## 2019-2020 Board of Trustees Annual Report

This past year has been an extremely busy time for your Board as we focused on three major areas:

- Working with the wide spectrum of experiences in our congregation since our minister's release of his book during General Assembly here in Spokane last June;
- Catching up on many Board duties that had been forgotten over the years; and,
- Carrying on with the duties of the Board after our minister announced a "practice of non-cooperation" with the Board, and doing our best to carry out church business and "represent unconflicted loyalty" to the congregation.

We began our year with a listening session on June 30, with 180 people present, and encouraged all of us to listen respectfully to the variety of opinions and experiences of other members and friends about the release of our minister's book. We invited all into curiosity: to consider — and ask — why other beloved members and friends felt the way they did.

We repeatedly stated that our church – this physical structure, as well as the church we each carry within ourselves – is big enough for all of us, and for all of our differences, and it is much bigger than any of us.

On July 19, we sent a letter to the congregation which listed the huge range of feedback we had received, including comments like:

1. want to understand more about why these issues matter so much to marginalized communities
2. have legitimate concerns over the process Todd used to bring out his book
3. feel hurt or blindsided or angry or that our covenant with Todd is damaged
4. want more Listening Sessions
5. basically agree with Todd
6. want discussion groups or a book study to talk about the ideas in Todd's book
7. want to defend Todd
8. feeling just fine
9. how do we talk to our children about what is happening in our church?

Even now, nearly a year later, this spectrum of experiences is still present in our congregation.

To be responsive to this feedback, the Board hosted a variety of events, as well as continuing our regular business:

1. **Mini-listening sessions with the Board** – every Sunday in August and September, Board members met one-on-one with interested people after both services.
2. **Listening to the disheartened** – on July 25, at the request of some members to share without being criticized for their views, a small group of Board members met with 25 people.
3. **Board Open Session** – on August 7, about 25 people met with the Board and shared their opinions.

4. **Dialogue with Difference** – on August 25 after church, 70 folks sat down to talk with each other and the Board. We invited everyone to be respectful and to open-heartedly share their perspective.
5. **Conflict and Compassion: How do we open our hearts and our minds to those close to us when we have very different views?** We arranged for Venerable Thubten Chodrun, the Abbess of Sravasti Abbey, to be a guest in our pulpit on September 8.
6. **Holding Space for All** – the Board, in a letter to the congregation, committed ourselves to holding space for ALL of the different thoughts, views, experiences and feelings of everyone in our congregation. In addition, as president I met frequently with Todd and made sure he was comfortable with the wording in whatever was sent out.
7. **Letter to UUMA affirming our minister's freedom of the pulpit** – on October 18 the Board sent a letter and email to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association strongly affirming our minister's freedom of the pulpit and his right to publicly share his ideas in any forum anywhere.
8. **Church security and Life-long Religious Education** – in September the Board hosted a listening session to gather input from the congregation on church security, and did the same in November on Religious Education.
9. **Healthy Congregations Team** – on October 25-27, Dave Mentz and Lauren MacNeill – experts in organizational development and dispute resolution – came to Spokane to begin a congregational assessment process that the Board, in consultation with our minister, had commissioned. They spoke with the minister, the staff, the Board, past Board presidents, and over 100 congregants. They reported their conclusions on December 8 and encouraged us to create an Implementation Team, which the Board did in January.
10. **Intention vs Impact Sunday Service** – we arranged for Lucas Leek, the Transgender Health & Community Coordinator at Planned Parenthood and a well-known workshop leader, to be a guest in our pulpit on November 10.
11. **Conversations with Temple Beth Shalom Board** – we worked to re-establish a good relationship, listen to each other's concerns, and explore what actions for social justice we might jointly undertake. We also arranged for the Rabbi to be a guest in our pulpit in March and for their Board to lead a workshop afterwards, which unfortunately had to be postponed due to the pandemic.
12. **Regular meetings between the minister and the Board president** – ten of these meetings took place between July and December; the minister shared no concerns about this working relationship.
13. **Communication with congregants** – over one hundred phone conversations, many hundreds of email and dozens of in-person meetings continued during the fall. In the new year, these communications multiplied.

14. **Open Forums at Board meetings** – when regular business was finished, and often during the meeting, the Board solicited comments from those present.

15. **Board Duties** – various Board duties had not been fulfilled in some years, so we worked with our minister to reinstitute a Team on Ministry, to update terms for Operations Team members, and to revive the Nominating Team. In addition, the Board worked to reinvigorate the Denominational Affairs Team, appointed Susan Tyler-Babkirk as our Historian, and secured the technical help of Dustin Hall to digitize our history.

16. **Appointment of Board member** – to fill a long-standing vacancy, we were pleased to appoint Stephanie Samson.

17. **Implementation Priorities and Team** – the Board decided on 3 priorities: heal, repair & rebuild our community, which became the Creating Community Team; review our governance documents; and research various anti-racist approaches used by other congregations and the UUA. The Board appointed Mary Lou Johnson and Rachelle Strawther to lead the Implementation Team and they recruited over 40 people to work on those priorities.

18. **Dealing with Ministerial Non-Cooperation** – in direct conflict with our bylaws, which specify that he “work in close cooperation with the Board,” our minister announced in early March a “practice of non-cooperation” and refused to work with our Board and our president. This meant that for months we could not communicate about pressing church business, including a marked reduction in pledges, long-time members leaving the church, holding a virtual Annual Meeting, and much more.

19. **Attempting to resolve differences** – in early April the Board asked the minister to a mediated process to address differences, which he was unwilling to do at that time, and he pointed out that binding arbitration was the means specified in the Ministerial Agreement to resolve disputes. The Board then hired an attorney to better understand how to resolve the situation with the minister. Finally, the Board invoked the binding arbitration clause of the Ministerial Agreement, but the minister refused to engage at that time. Given no other tenable options, the Board did its best to work on church business alone.

20. **Slanderous emails** — The Board received directly many slanderous emails and many others, related to the Board, were circulated as mass emails. Of those emails many were directed at our president. The hostility and lack of respectful communication was out of covenant, hurtful, and harmful to the Board and to the congregation.

21. **Appointment of Board members** – to fill vacancies on the Board, we were pleased to appoint Warren Carpenter in April, and Mary Lou Johnson in May.

22. **Pandemic, Board duties & Annual Meeting** – Board members spent over one hundred hours researching how to carry out our duties with the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. We recruited a wonderful Tech Team to help us hold Board meetings, Town Halls, and more via Zoom. We crafted a hybrid Annual Meeting via Zoom with mail-in ballots and a second meeting

in the fall. We worked closely with those who were concerned about our inability to follow normal procedures. We also worked diligently with a parliamentarian and moderator to hold the annual meeting and our elections in the most democratic way.

In closing, we have been vilified by a number of our congregants, but we have done our best to stay covenantal, to be respectful, and to be courteous to those who have treated us poorly. We are committed to following our covenants, and to serving this congregation with integrity. We continue to remind ourselves to act in community and to know the truth of what Francis David said over 400 years ago: *"We need not think alike to love alike."*

In community,  
Susan Virnig, President  
UUCS Board of Trustees  
June 14, 2020