

Minister's Annual Report May, 2023

Last year, after only a few months with you and more than two years of pandemic life, I ended my report by saying that I looked forward to another year with you all as we redefine "normal." Now, I am surprised just how normal the world feels again, even though it is undeniably different.

UUCSC is still a congregation that operates like a family, though the average age is inching upward every year. Despite the grayness of our hair, the energy for the work and love of the congregation remains high. Our commitment to social justice is as strong as it has ever been. There's a universal feeling among us that we want to be present to the world, not to increase our membership and income (though that would be nice) but to bring our saving message to the world. And our message *is* saving in this political environment that gets more hostile and divisive each year.

UUCSC looks a little different. We've lost some members to death, most recently Essjay, our oldest, at 97 years. We've lost others to new habits formed during the pandemic. But we've also gained new members. We just welcomed nine people, and have at least seven more lined up for membership in the fall. The sanctuary is graced by new artwork each month, reflecting our liturgical themes. We're welcoming the children and into the services more frequently. Perhaps best of all, we are eating together more often than we have in years, enjoying one another's company.

We started the year in September the way we always do, with Water Communion, plus an informal congregational meeting. We talked about the things that were working, how we wanted to move forward and where we wanted to focus our attention. We summed up our mission statement in 6 words: Welcoming; Loving; Growing Spiritually; Seeking Justice. Those words have since been committed to new tie-dyed t-shirts created by the Membership Committee.

We also talked about having the Coordinating Committee come up with a plan for evolving our model of leadership development from the Nominating Committee into something more sustainable over the long haul. That committee is still working on it, and in the meantime leadership has begun evolving from a "the sisterhood of getting it done," to more of a "siblinghood of getting it done."

In the last few months, it's become clear that the existing organizational model is unsustainable in the long term. When it was first created, it was based on organizational models typical of voluntary associations in the post-war era: men made the decisions (the board) and women did the work (committees). Here at UUCSC women have made most of the decisions and done most of the work. Regardless of gender, the nature of the work has changed. Much of what used to take gaggles of volunteers can now happen with one computer and a few key strokes by one person. (Remember typed newsletters, mimeos and hand-addressed envelopes?) Maybe we could do with fewer committees?

Meanwhile, the demands of the treasurer have exploded over that last 20 years, because of complex software systems, government regulations at every level, and requirements of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Maybe we could divide tasks between two or three people, including a paid staff person?

The world has changed, and not just because of Covid-19. The world has just changed. It is changing, and that isn't going to stop.

One thing is clear: While other denominations are flailing, we are thriving. We are thriving because of the love, vision and commitment of the members, leaders and staff of this congregation. We are thriving because Unitarian Universalism is a theology the world needs right now. We are thriving because we see the opportunities in all of the challenges that face us.

I'm looking forward to the year ahead with you. I can't wait to see what we come up with next.

In Peace,
Rev. Denis Paul