

## Minister's Annual Report May, 2024

At an informal congregational meeting in the fall of 2022, then-board chair Elizabeth Donovan identified four ideas that summarized our mission statement: Welcoming, Loving, Growing Spiritually, Seeking Justice.

Our mission statement officially remains the same, but the six-word summary is easy to remember, and an effective tool for looking at the state of our congregation at the end of this exciting year.

### **Welcoming and Loving**

The Membership Committee and Greeters are doing a great job of welcoming visitors, who are greeted in the sanctuary by colorful art on the front wall, created collaboratively by many hands of many sizes. Our volunteer cleaning crew continues to save us thousands of dollars a year, and thanks to the Facilities and Garden Committees leading the charge, the space looks better than ever with lots of input by energetic members and friends.

We have resumed occasional coffee hours after Sunday services. Our quarterly Friday night dinners have benefitted from broader involvement in cooking, setting up and cleaning. Through formal and informal arrangements, Helping Hands have been delivering food and giving rides and other assistance to members and friends in need of accompaniment.

Our membership has grown, as has attendance at Sunday Services and all of our programming. During that congregational meeting when we isolated our "six words," we talked about the changing demographics of South County, recognizing that while the number of families may be shrinking, we're likely to see growth among recent retirees and transplants to the area. That forecast seems to be playing out, and still we are seeing more families with "tweens" joining participating in RE through Dungeons and Dragons.

### **Growing Spiritually**

Sunday Services have been alive with music and diverse voices. the Worship Committee has welcomed interesting and insightful guest preachers, including three UU ministers. Members and friends of our congregation continue to share spiritual reflections and sermons, always relearning that their perspectives, insights and vulnerability are deeply appreciated. Our Worship Assistant Grounding sessions have been fruitful and exciting.

We've introduced a monthly Meditation Circle which has enriched the spiritual lives of participants while creating peaceful, contemplative space to be together. Art at the front of the sanctuary gets more joyful and collaborative, as an expanding group of artists of all ages reflect on the worship theme of the month.

Our Whole Lives (OWL) has deepened our understanding of ourselves and our most important intimate relationships in ways that are appropriate to K-1 children, teens, and older adults. A group of parents and empty nesters are coming with impressive programming for *The Wunder Academy of Metamorphosis*, which will debut at the end of August, in the process expressing their spiritual connectivity in new ways. With this kind of energy and creativity, Lee and I imagine this program (which isn't a "camp!") will soon expand to include families not currently involved with our congregation.

### **Seeking Justice**

The Racial Justice Study Group and the Social Justice Advisory Council continue to meet regularly for study and reflection on systems of oppression while showing up for justice, wearing our shirts, carrying signs, signing petitions and demanding change. Meanwhile, they've been producing educational events with people like Sandra Laub and organizations like the Tomaquag Museum.

The Hurdis Fund continues to make possible social justice events

All of these ways in which we are welcoming newcomers as they are, loving each other and the world through all of our celebrations and sorrows has made us all, tending to our spiritual lives, studying racism and showing up for justice, I think, increases our sense of belonging to something important. Isn't that what our UU faith and congregational life are all about?

### **Challenges**

None of this is to say that everything is perfect at UUCSC. Once again we are facing a budget shortfall. Our building is showing its age, demanding some projects that will cost more than we have in the bank. We'll need to think about how to increase pledging, build capital for required improvements, and create endowments through legacy giving, in order to secure UUCSC's future in the decades to come. All of that requires generosity, and deep reflection on what really matters.

If we are to continue really welcoming and loving new people, we'll have to be present in a way that requires we all shift from thinking about "recruiting young families" to actually *serv*ing them. The world is different now, in a ways that are easy for younger folks to articulate because they feel it more than us gray haired people. We need to listen to them, and meet them where they are if we are very to make them welcome.

I know we can do this. The energy you all give to getting it done is a constant source of inspiration for me. And I know most of you feel the same way.

In Peace,  
Rev. Denis Paul