

Unitarian Universalists of Transylvania County

Rev. Ilene Kaur Tompkins-Gillispie

Minister's Report, May 20, 2018

Highlights of Our Year

This year, we transitioned from the newly-extant Social Justice Task Force to our final, fully-fledged Social Action Team. The Team has re-vamped its operating guidelines and is now deeply engaged in UUTC's own Dignity Project, helping to distribute hard-to-access supplies to our neighbors in need.

Our Stewardship efforts continue to grow and mature. Our plan is now to have our Stewardship Team operating year-round. I enjoyed preaching on the theme of Wealth throughout March, culminating in very successful Generosity Sunday. I am very grateful to Kristin Leesment for her capable and compassionate work in coordinating our pledge drive.

UUTC's treasurer Dave Roberts has gone to great lengths to streamline the role of treasurer. This great gift given by Dave will benefit us in many ways down the line, and it makes the job of our next treasurer much simpler.

Our Finance Team has capably handled UUTC's fiscal health this year and has presented us with an excellent (and balanced) budget for the coming fiscal year.

With gratitude to Heather Layton and our CRE team, our CRE program continues to deepen its work. We now offer a Time For All Ages at every 11AM Service. We have quiet Activity Bags available for children during worship. Intergenerational Services (Christmas and Easter) have been successful and will be continued and expanded in the future. Heather and Kevin Lausch co-led UUTC's Our Whole Lives (OWL) program, which was well-received by youth from our congregation and from the community. Chalice Camp continues to be popular and a good fundraiser to boot.

Our installation service, celebrating the formal beginning of our shared ministry, was beautiful and meaningful, and included clergy and lay participants from the local interfaith community as well as UU ministers and laypeople from around the USA. Professional photos from the event will be an asset to our media presence.

I have been involved this year at The Mountain, UU Camp and Conference Center, chaperoning a youth conference and attending Southeast UU Ministers Association Retreats. I will be delivering a reflection there for a climate justice conference next week.

The re-orientation of UUTC's sanctuary means that our choir and musicians have better acoustics and a more comfortable space. We have also installed book racks underneath most of the choir's seats to accommodate hymnals and other music.

Our worship team has worked hard and collaborated gracefully with me to continue theme-based worship and to attract gifted guest speakers for times when I am not in the public. Carol Flake has also facilitated the Shared Pulpit course, which will gift us with several sermons given by UUTC members and friends who have not previously preached.

Throughout this year, I have been involved in our International UU movement—attending the International Council of UUs biennial conference in Nepal, and joining the Board of Directors of the UU Partner Church Council beginning July 1.

I have also been involved in activities of our denomination nationally and regionally. I attended the First Year Ministers' Seminar at the UUA, and served as the Candidate Liaison for the winter 2017 meeting of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Throughout the year, I have attended monthly Western Carolinas UU clergy gatherings for actively-serving ministers, and this May Rev. Jean Rowe and I hosted the Western Carolinas clergy (active and retired) meeting at UUTC. I am delighted that UUTC will have 4 delegates and 2 staff (myself and RK) attending the UU General Assembly in Kansas City, MO this June.

In Transylvania County, I was involved this year in the VISION program, regularly attended Koinonia interfaith group meetings, led monthly gatherings at College Walk, and continued to develop relationships with individuals working in local organizations. In terms of outreach to our community, UUTC's Lenten Service was particularly well-received and drew many visitors as well as several prospective new members.

With great gratitude to Facilities, Property, RK Young, and Dave Roberts, many improvements have been made this year to our building and grounds.

Muffins with the Minister has been well-attended and a lovely way to deepen relationships with newcomers and long-timers alike.

With deep gratitude to John Austin, our amazing music program continues to grow. Our incredible choir, along with small groups and outside ensembles, have offered a wonderful breadth of music throughout the year. Our Eclectics continue to be enriching both to UUTC and to the wider community, and I enjoy playing with them regularly. Our accompanist, Carlene Ragan, continues to bless us with her beautiful piano-playing week after week in services.

Our Advisory Council (GMAC) has done excellent work in supporting the ministry of our congregation during this year of transition.

Throughout the year, I have drawn great support from our Minister Emeritus, Rev. Ernie Mills, and have welcomed him to participate in the life of UUTC in whatever ways he feels comfortable and able.

Our Adult Religious Education Team has offered diverse opportunities for adult education and enrichment throughout the year.

I continue to work closely with RK to close holes with regards to policy/procedure at UUTC.

I continue to work with Kevin Smith and RK Young to improve UUTC's media presence. We now have a private Facebook group for members and friends to share information and announcements, we continue to have and use a public Facebook page for promotion, and are getting more photos/videos of worship and other events in the hopes of using this media in future advertising.

In terms of my own Professional Development, this year I attended Susan Beaumont's training on Staff Supervision, which I found to be supremely helpful. I meet monthly with the Fellowship Task Force/COM, have attended various webinars through UUA/UUMA, will be attending pre-GA Ministry Days, will be pursuing additional professional development opportunities next fiscal year (still discerning which ones), and meet monthly with my ministerial mentor Rev. Jan Taddeo. Next fiscal year I will begin to meet with a Peer Discernment Group of other UU ministers early in their careers.

Our Ministerial Discretionary Fund has helped to support UUTC members and friends as well as community members in times of crisis, ranging from utilities and rent emergencies, heating assistance during this winter's cold snap, healthcare support of many kinds, and food, holiday gifts, and other needed supplies in times of need.

By the Numbers

At our New Member Welcoming Ceremonies this Fall and Spring, we welcomed 15 new members, and we have many prospective new members signed up for the Membership Team's next New Member Course on June 16.

We have distributed thousands of dollars' worth of menstrual hygiene supplies, condoms, and diapers to residents of our county, working to advocate for and support their dignity.

More than 60 people (UUTC members and friends as well as those unaffiliated) attended the Sikhism Adult RE Course this spring. What an amazing turnout!

Our average pledge (for fiscal year 2018-2019) has increased 16% from last fiscal year.

Recommendations

I concur strongly with Dave Roberts' recommendation as treasurer that we need to find more ways to get money out of our building. It costs us to operate our facilities and I am committed to finding creative ways to monetize our space. For UUTC's future financial sustainability, we need to begin to raise funds in ways beyond simply pledging.

There is a deep need for CRE to use the yellow house as classroom and office space. As we draw more money from rental income from both the yellow house (46 Varsity) and the Oxford house, hopefully this will be a reality shortly. I recommend that this be a priority if we wish to continue developing a vibrant Children's Religious Education program that will draw young families to UUTC and help our children and youth feel supported.

I recommend cost of living raises (at least) for UUTC's staff in the next fiscal year and understand the board's/finance's choice not to do so this fiscal year as it has been an expensive year. However, as the primary advocate for staff, I find it important to name this reality in my report.

Upcoming Work

In the coming year, I will be pursuing opportunities for UUTC to offer youth programming for middle and high school young people. We are the only truly progressive congregation in the county and we do ourselves and the county a disservice by ignoring this pressing need. I am seeking a few devoted adults to lead programming with me—no planning will be necessary on your part as we start out.

I will be seeking to develop a team or task force to address UUTC's Strategic Planning needs—this may come in the form of liaisons from the Board, GMAC, and another team/committee combining with several additional individuals. One responsibility of this group will be planning, along with the Board, as the blue house gets razed. What should go in its place?

UUTC needs to revitalize our Personnel Team. I will be seeking participants for this team, as it is important to have for the health of our staff.

Beginning in the fall, I will be facilitating goal-setting and progress-checking with several of our staff who I supervise most closely.

I plan to teach a UU history course in the fall and a World Religions course (likely Hinduism) in the spring through Adult Religious Education.

Gratitude

I give thanks for our wonderful staff—RK Young, Heather Layton, Sue Gervais, Kevin Smith, John Austin, Carlene Ragan, and Hector and Theresa Flores. Our excellent teen AV operators support Kevin on his Sundays off—Ian Fox and Mae Peterson. Trisha Powers coordinates our large cohort of childcare workers who provide compassionate care to the youngest among us. Susan Slocum and Susan Bir volunteer weekly in our office to support RK with UUTC's growing administrative needs as well as to support our membership and leadership development ministries.

The volunteers who make this church run are too many to name individually (what a blessing that is), but it is my hope that we each take time to thank the volunteers who make coffee, clean and organize our kitchen, care for our beautiful grounds, greet and usher on Sundays, make sure our finances and technology are running smoothly, serve on teams and committees, provide us with gorgeous music, print/fold and send church publications, visit and care for UUTC members and

friends, share their talent from the pulpit, coordinate and plan worship, and share their time and talents in so many other needed ways. How lucky we are to have such a devoted group of doers, helpers, healers, fixers, dreamers, and friends.

I am grateful, too, for this year's Board of Trustees—Carol Moore, Peter Mockridge, Kay Webb, Dave Roberts, Cantey Carpenter, Brigid Fox, and Wayne Smith. Many thanks for serving UUTC in this important way!

Honoring Those We Miss

This year, we lost several beloved UUTC members and friends. We hold their memories in love:

Fred Erb

Bob Thompson

Ema Stone

Isabel Lynch

Peg Hall

I submit this report to you all with great gratitude. I am proud of all that we have accomplished in this first year together. I am excited for all that is to come. And I am blessed to minister to you and to be ministered to by you as well.

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Ilene Kaur Tompkins-Gillispie