



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia

Annual Report

FY 2016-17

June 4, 2017

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Board President

UCC Annual Report FY2017

In accordance with the UCC Bylaws Section 7.4, this document is to provide a written report on the activities of the Congregation for the past year, along with recommended changes, improvements, and modifications with respect to the activities and the welfare of the Congregation.

Introduction

In my first Unigram President's Column, I wrote that we, as a congregation, faced a "fork in the road" where we must decide between timid and bold responses to the many challenges that were facing us at the start of the fiscal year. There were risks with both choices, but I hoped at the time that we would be bold and I am delighted that we were!

Thanks to the amazing work of so many of you, this has been a very successful year. Of course, challenges remain, but this is a good time for us to reflect upon both accomplishments and challenges. This report will provide an update on progress toward the FY17 Goals that the board set at its July, 2017 retreat (including relevant committee reports), provide a summary of the remaining committee and program group activities, and conclude with observations and recommendations for the future.

FY17 UCC Board Goals

Complete successful ministerial search process

At our last congregational annual meeting, the membership approved a search committee consisting of Dave Crocket and Ann Johnson (co-chairs), Rod Brown, Rebecca Drennan, Brian Dudick, Linda Brennon, and Buzzie Kelly. This committee worked long and hard to follow the UUA ministerial search process through two rounds. June 11-18 has been scheduled for a candidating week during which all congregants are encouraged to meet with Rev. Liebmann and Jody and to attend both Sunday services that he will lead. We fully expect to conclude this week with a settled minister!

The UCC owes a special debt of gratitude to the Search Committee.

Enhance membership growth and retention

FY16 witnessed a significant drop in membership and we began the year with 173 members. The Membership Committee, chaired by Patty Drews, continued outreach efforts such as setting up and staffing a welcome table each Sunday, reaching out to visitors before, during, and after service and conducting face-to-face and email follow up. Six visitor orientation sessions were held during the year and an effort was made to contact members who were not attending services. A new "lunch after church" effort was launched.

Friendship Dinners were inaugurated and eight were held, hosting from 6-12 attendees. Michael and Buzzie Kelly hosted their annual 4th of July Party. A new member dinner was hosted at UCC for 39 new members.

The good news is that as we approach the end of this fiscal year, membership topped 200. This growth is a testament to not only the work of the Membership Committee but also to the myriad activities that involve and attract members to the UUCC.

Enhance printed and digital communications

We began FY17 with a Wordpress shell that had been adopted by an ad hoc group of members who had begun populating it. Lis Turner took on the role of Web Conduit, with the assistance and input of many members and friends. The UUCC Website uucolumbia.org is a vibrant and informative guide to UUCC. Special thanks to Keitha Whitaker and Laura Hartwig for their management of sections of the site. In addition to the UUCC Web site, Laura created and maintains a Social Action Facebook page.

Strengthen the financial foundation

Last fiscal year, the congregation adopted a deficit budget, one with no board reserve or contingency. Again, the congregation stepped forward, with fund raisers (up over \$6,000), enhanced pledging (up 7%), and private gifts to not only get through the year, but to emerge with a significant surplus. This surplus has enabled UUCC to meet several one-time funding needs such as the ministerial search and physical plant emergencies, to propose a balanced budget for FY18 that contains some exciting enhancements.

Improve building and grounds

- *Conduct a successful building renovation Capital Campaign*

In July of 2016, the UUCC board set a goal of \$170,000 for a capital campaign to fund renovations of restrooms, RE Wing, Social Hall and Sanctuary. Led by an ad hoc committee, Chaired by Pat Mohr with members Quillin Davis, Dot Brown, Don Dodson, Kevin Meredith, Nancie Shillington-Perez, Joe Long, and Peck Drennan, (*ex officio* members Rev. Jennie and Phil Turner), the Capital Campaign for building renovation recorded over \$190,000 in cash gifts and pledges at its close on January 31, 2017. As of the latest report, over \$115,000 cash in hand had been received.

- *Complete at least Phase I of the building renovation*

In February of 2017, the UUCC board appointed a Building Renovation *ad hoc* committee (BRC), chaired by Richard Culler with members Carolyn West, Quillin Davis, Richard McLeod. (*ex officio* Members Rev Jennie and Phil Turner). This committee was charged with working with Peck Drennan, architect, to plan and implement the renovation, ideally as one contracted project. This included recommending bridge financing for the outstanding pledges.

As of mid May, the BRC has met several times, tentatively identified sources for the necessary bridge loan at a very low interest rate, and established a timeline for the project. Several meetings with stakeholders were held to solicit input on the plans. Electrical and structural professionals have been involved in creating the final plans. Initial construction is forecast to begin in August.

- *Continue improvements outside of areas impacted by Capital Campaign*

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Keeping up the building and grounds at UUCC is a formidable challenge. Maintenance of a 65 year old building requires constant attention. The Building and Grounds Committee, led by Carolyn West, held several work days this year that resulted in painting exterior walls and window frames, washing windows, cutting down trees and vines that were shading the RE wing, etc.

Last summer, the B&G Committee recommended that UUCC engage the services of a grounds keeping company and the board implemented this recommendation. Our grounds have never looked so good! Bill Dolly joined UUCC as our new custodian in the fall and the interior of UUCC has sparkled since.

The Library Building interior and door has undergone a wonderful transformation from a gloomy cluttered space to one that is bright and inviting. The library's HVAC unit was also replaced.

A Scatter Garden was added to our Memorial Garden just in time for a service last fall.

Finally, by the time of our congregational meeting, there should be an upgraded electrical box which should address the perennial problem of overloaded circuits!

These developments are the result of many UUCC hands and hearts. Thank You!

Enhance the interaction of the whole congregation with RE

The Children and Youth Religious Education Committee, chaired by Keitha Whitaker, was very active this year. See the complete report under the committee section below. Thanks to the wonderful volunteers who made our CYRE programs possible and to Stephanie Palmer-Smith for her work with the UUCC.

Analyze and propose revisions, if necessary, of the UUCC governance

In the summer of 2016, the UUCC board established an *ad hoc* committee to respond to this goal. Chaired by Keith Whitaker, with members Regina Moody, Bob Whitaker, and Richard Culler (Rev. Barrington participating). This committee has spent considerable time researching governance structures in other UU congregations as well as church governance in general. They have developed preliminary recommendations.

UUCC Committees and Program Groups

While specific committees were mentioned in the above report on UUCC Board Goals, the successes noted were also the result of other committees and program groups. What follows is a summary of the FY 17 activities of committees and program groups not mentioned previously. The available monthly and annual reports of all UUCC committees and program groups are published each month on the UUCC web page. The annual reports submitted by committee chairs are also available.

UUCC Committees

Adult RE

Chaired by Pat Mohr, this committee held a viewing of *Defying the Nazis: The Sharp's War*, followed by a discussion. They co-sponsored a panel, "Color of Privilege", a series of classes on the sociology of

religion taught by Donald Cooper and Patrick Saucier, started a Christian affinity group led by Jenny Beale, sponsored a class led by Donald Cooper around the book, *God is not One*, co-sponsored "How to Plan a Funeral", and led UUCF participation in UUA Common Read of *The Third Reconstruction*.

Caring and Hospitality

Chaired by Sandy Chubon, this committee provided cookies and coffee and cleanup for Sunday Social hour. They provided services for members and friends who are hospitalized or experience other physical problems as well as visits to our homebound.

Children and Youth Religious Education

Chaired by Keitha Whitaker, with members Bethany Storlazzi, Cindy Blackman, Gail Dawson, Nancy Shillington-Perez, Ginny Verne, Darrell Shier, Tim VanDenBerg, Lilith Hudson, and Emerson VanDenBerg. This committee led family participation in Capital Campaign activities, provide opportunities to participate in service and social action activities including making sandwiches to serve at Food not Bombs events, serving at the Howlmore Animal Sanctuary, the Family Shelter, and the Carolina Wildlife Rescue Center. Led by Sophia Storlazzi Johnson, they advocated for elephants at the Ringling Brother's Circus.

UUCF children and youth were represented at fall and congregational CON's at the Mountain. Nine Youth participated in the Boston Heritage trip thanks to the energy of the parents and the successful Fund raising efforts.

The CYRE group were leaders in the use of the web to provide information. This included keeping up the CYRE sections of the UUCF web site and enhancing their Facebook page.

Finally, children and youth participated in three multi-generational services.

Endowment

Printed endowment brochure.

Finance

Conducted successful annual pledge drive, formulated FY 18 budget for review and adoption by board. There were numerous ad hoc fund raising efforts throughout the year which helped to yield a positive balance at the end of the fiscal year. Thanks to all who planned and implemented these fund raisers and to those who attended and gave of their resources.

Personnel

This committee, chaired by Marc Drews, managed the process of hiring a new custodian. Position descriptions of all UUCS staff members were acquired and saved.

Social Action

This was a banner year, under the leadership of committee chair Linda McLeod, for the Social Action Committee. The myriad events and other accomplishments represent a significant portion of UUCS's community image. These include: Marching alongside and riding in the UUCS Pride Parade float, hosting an Islamophobia Workshop, Participating in the Rally for Democracy in January, instituting "Community Conversations" that included a showing of and discussion about the film *Defying the Nazis: The Sharp's War*, and a showing of and discussion about the film, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence*, participating in the March on Science, and holding a Ramadan Dinner. Events scheduled for the remainder of the year include: participating in the *Gun Violence Awareness Family Friendly Fest and Walk SC* and hosting a Know "Your Rights" presentation about the rights of immigrants.

The Social Action Committee led the effort to install a Welcome Banner on the exterior of UUCS. The sale of "Standing on the Side of Love" T-shirts, led by this committee has increased the visibility of UUCS throughout the area. Through the UUCS partnership with "Families Helping Families, four families had a better Christmastime.

Last summer and, again, this summer Bauer Western led the staffing of tables at UUCS to sell vegetables through a low-income farmers market. UUCS's outreach was enhanced through collection and delivery of groceries to Harvest Hope, led by Ceren Farr, collecting and delivering items for the Inclement Weather Center, and serving meals at Transitions, led by Bob Whitaker, as well as staffing the Transitions library, led by Phil Turner.

Technology

Chaired by David Roof, this committee provided audiovisual services during services.

Worship

The Worship Committee, chaired by Richard McLeod, was key to the outstanding services that we enjoyed throughout the year. The committee provided guest speakers and worked closely with worship leaders to integrate the many elements of a successful service. An excellent variety of speakers were obtained representing various religious, cultural, political, and educational institutions. Issues addressed in these services included gun violence, science and religion, climate change, Buddhism, white supremacy, Black Lives Matter, and immigration. Special services reflecting seasonal and multi-generational topics were planned and implemented. Of special note is the "Evolution of God" conference that the committee organized in coordination with Rebecca Drennan and Dr. Roger Ray.

A special aspect of UUCS services this year was the variety and quality of musicians that performed. The Worship Committee is to be commended for their efforts to involve and feature so many of our talented members and friends.

UUCF Program Groups and Congregational Services

Animal Ministry

Chaired by Anita Grossman, this very active group was responsible for the Blessing of the Animals, Vegan Potluck in partnership with the Columbia Vegetarian Meetup Group, participated in “Bark to the Park”, and, led by Sophia Storlazzi Jonson, protested against circus animal cruelty.

Greeters

Don Dodson and Dot Brown led the UUCF Greeters this year. They reported that finding an adequate number of committed volunteers to serve in this important role was a continuing challenge.

Collection Counters

Led by Joan Waterson, this group makes sure that contributions are accounted for and end up in the right account. Members include Linda Brennon, Pat Davies, Chuck Hassel, Susan Robinson, Connie Hudson, and Jerry Cover.

Book clubs

UUCF has the good fortune to have two book clubs which were active throughout the year. These are the Women’s Book Club, led by Sandy Chubon and the UUCF Book Club, led by Ruthie Saunders.

Transitions Team

Chaired by Kevin Meredith, this team worked with Rev. Jennie throughout the year.

Disappointments and Challenges

This has been such an amazing year that it was difficult to identify an area of disappointment. It was sad to lose the UUCF Coffeehouse after so many years of good music and community. After over a year of trying to work out a way to maintain this relationship without endangering our non-profit status, it became clear that this was not possible.

There are two areas of challenge and these are related. The first is human resources, i.e., willing hands to do the work of the congregation. As is the case in all mostly volunteer-based organizations, there is a predictable life cycle of active members. We need to have the time and energy to focus on leadership development and encouraging and enabling more members to take on the burden of operating the congregation.

The second is fiscal resources. In the movie, *Shakespeare in Love*, when asked how a seemingly intractable problem would be solved, the play’s producer would reply, “I don’t know, it’s a mystery.” This seems to be the approach at UUCF and it has largely worked so far. Somehow, resources appear. However, we are currently carrying a debt load of over \$9,000/year and our physical facilities are fragile. A fund escrow to cover large repairs and other predictable expenses such as minister’s sabbatical should

be considered and we should participate in opportunities such as the *Wake Now Campaign* to obtain future and present resources.

Thanks

I have kept almost all of the Order of Service documents from FY17 and I am amazed and humbled by the efforts detailed in these and by the monthly and annual reports. A significant majority of UCC members and friends are involved in the work of the congregation and to try to mention individuals risks unintended omission. I would like to offer heartfelt thanks, collectively, to the staff, board, committee and program group chairs and members, and to all individuals who went the extra mile to make this a successful year.

Of course, there is one individual that we all need to thank, our Rev. Jennie Barrington. Rev. Jennie is submitting a separate annual report but we already are aware of the many ways in which she has guided us through the interim. The calm and steady assurance and advice has been a special gift to me this year.