

# SHARING OUR STORY

## FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF OTTAWA ANNUAL REPORT 2020



*"We kindle the light within and inspire courage to nurture the web of life  
and to create a just and compassionate world"*

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*Cover images:*

*Excerpts from various eUU Weekly Newsletters  
and the Video Presentation to members at the Spring Annual General Meeting 2020*

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# Pandemic

What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.

And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20



# Table of Contents

<b>Pandemic, by Lynn Ungar .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Programming .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Message from the Minister .....	4
Religious Exploration .....	6
Music Program .....	7
Spiritual Care .....	8
<b>Administration .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Message from the President, Board of Directors.....	9
Operations, Finance and Facility Management.....	11
Archives.....	12
<b>Committees of the Board.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Campus Planning Committee (CPC).....	13
Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM) .....	14
Communications and Outreach Committee .....	15
Embracing Diversity Committee (EDC) .	15
Finance Committee.....	16
Governance Committee.....	17
Nominating Committee .....	17
Personnel Committee .....	18
Settled Minister Search Committee (SMSC) .....	18
Stewardship Committee .....	19
<b>Fundraising .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Fall Fair .....	21
<b>Teams .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Adult Learning Team .....	22

Caring Network Executive .....	23
Denominational Affairs Team (DAT) .....	23
Lay Chaplaincy Team .....	25
Property Team .....	25
Right Relations Team (RRT).....	26
Welcome and Membership Team (W&M) .....	27
Worship Associates .....	28
<b>Social Responsibility .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Social Responsibility Council (SRC) & SR Coordinating Team (SRCT).....	29
Global Justice Working Group.....	29
Environmental Action Group (EAG) .....	30
Indigenous Relations Working Group (IRWG) .....	31
Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG).....	32
Poverty Awareness Action Group .....	33
<b>Social Groups.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Bridge Group .....	34
Empower Dance .....	34
Friends of the Meditation Gardens.....	35
Knitters Group .....	36
Reading for Growth - Monday .....	36
Spiritual Growth Circle .....	37
Voyageur Men's Group .....	37
Women's Personal Growth Group.....	37
<b>Appendix A: Developmental Ministry Priorities, 2018-2021.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Imagine, by Lynn Ungar .....</b>	<b>41</b>



# Programming

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## Message from the Minister

-Rev. Patricia Guthmann Haresch



*...The church is not just a set of doors open on Sunday morning, but the commitment day after day, and moment after moment, of our hearts creaking open the doors of welcome...*

*The church is not simply a building, a steeple, a pew.*

*The church is the gathering together of all the people, and experiences, and fear, and love, and hope in our resilient hearts... to say to the world: welcome, come in, lay down your heartache, and pick up hope and love...*

- From "The Church Has Left the Building" by Rev. Margaret Weis

4 In March of 2020, the congregation may have left the building, but as Lisa Sharp highlighted in her President's Report and as the entirety of this year's Annual Report indicates, a worldwide pandemic certainly didn't stop us from being a congregation. FirstU truly demonstrated that we are more than a building or place of worship, more than what happens during Sunday Services. As I shared with you during my "Sermon on the Amount" to launch last fall's Annual Pledge Campaign:

*We find ourselves in a time that is particularly veiled in mystery, uncertainty. Yet, here we are, living, breathing, still connected and reaching out to each other. Navigating our way through these strange times, figuring it out as we go.*

*...This year more than ever, we have pushed out, pushed through our four walls and haven't let a global pandemic stop us from getting together virtually, on the phone, in socially distanced walks and on each other's decks. Raising money for good causes, presenting lectures, making deliveries from groceries to glasses to underwear and toiletries. Even the committee meetings continue.*

I chuckle now to think that when I arrived in the fall of 2018 as your Developmental Minister, some of you told me that folks at FirstU were resistant to change. LOL. From day one, you all were ready and willing to change.



Overnight, Zoom has become a norm at FirstU. Some people are already saying that even in Post-Covid-19 times they will be preferring Zoom and livestreamed services to night time meetings and going out on stormy, icy days. We have a robust YouTube channel with Sunday Services, lectures and forums. Our online communications including our weekly eUU, our website, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter not only keeps our own congregation informed, but is viewed by hundreds and has attracted new members and visitors.

When I arrived you said you had tried Leadership Council meetings, they didn't work and they wouldn't work, and with the leadership of the Board and now the Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM), the Leadership Council has proven to be an important point of contact and exchange of ideas, especially during COVID-19 times amongst the Board, Staff, committees, teams and working, now action groups.

The CoSM and the Embracing Diversity Committee (EDC) took shape after my arrival and now they are and I hope they remain vital committees continuing to provide important resources and connections. Do look on our website for CoSM's "Volunteer Handbook" and the EDC is rolling out its "Welcome Book" as two examples of informative resources.

For a full list of initiatives and accomplishments during this time of Developmental Ministry do look to the summary list included with this Annual Report.

5

Again from my "Sermon on the Amount"

*"Because you and others have maintained your support of FirstU through your offering of volunteer time, dollars and talent, we have made the switch over to what has become known as Church 2.0, or a church without walls. Not just on our feet, but with tools to connect and network through technology to stretch out beyond brick and mortar structures."*

And as Lisa highlighted in the President's report, the Staff was also critical in helping make the switch to a church without walls. Our 30+ connecting callers also helped us remain connected at this time and some are still calling.

*Stand firm, gray rock.  
Tough-weathered beam, hold fast.  
Staunch walls, proud roof  
Repel the wintry blast!*

*Glow warm within  
With highest hope and joy,  
Clear flame of love  
Burn brighter, warmer still.*

*1916 blessing for a new Unitarian church building*

I know your flame of love will burn brighter and warmer still. - Rev. Pat





## Religious Exploration

*Neo Yaxley, Director of Religious Exploration*



Our mandate includes the following:

- Provide a nurturing and safe environment
- Provide UU faith-based programming for children
- Encourage children to develop an appreciation for diversity
- Cultivate children to become people who are caretakers of our planet
- Create opportunities for children and their parents to create community with one another

This year was a challenging year for RE and for families.

We were doing better in RE before the pandemic hit, but we did not have the strong foundation to keep the momentum moving upward. It was confusing to know which direction to move in with the constant changing of zones. We have been providing virtual RE on a rotating basis for our Chalice Playgroup and UU Kids. The Chalice Playgroup did not participate, but we did maintain UU Kids sessions throughout the year. Lessons were posted every Friday in the e-UU for families to participate in with their children. We tried to initiate in-person RE; we would have a plan to be back together, and then we would be back online. The constant unknown was challenging.

We have a program; we are offering a UU curriculum and need the energy of children and parents to build momentum. The congregation has people in its life that are young. Bring your children, bring your grandchildren. We have built a program. We had Bibleodeon, OWL, and Chalice Play Kids in operation but need the energy of more kids.



We also need congregants to volunteer in RE. Families are exhausted and cannot be depended on to be volunteers. Perhaps a system where each congregant is asked to volunteer once a year in some capacity in RE could be helpful.

Our goals going forward include:

- Establish a committee to work with the DRE. Create a team before the new church year begins. Aug 30
- Establish relationships between parents and congregants. A sort of buddy system.
- More activities and topics covered in the church which are of interest to young families, during the breakfast hour etc.
- Make coffee hour more kid-friendly upstairs.
- Make the children's playground friendlier for parents to gather.



## Music Program

-Deirdre Kellerman, Director of Music



The Music Program runs three choral ensembles which provide music and leadership on Sundays, as well as small group ministry for more than 70 of our congregants. The program also runs auxiliary musical events throughout the year for revenue, community development and multigenerational programming.

Jan-March: regular music programming, including annual Jazz Vespers, and preparation for spring concert with guest Unitarian choirs from Kingston, Montreal and Mississauga.

March-August: cancellation of spring concert, first choir virtual project, shift to online programming (Song Circles and Summer Choir).

September-December: full shift to online programming for all three choirs + Song Circles. 10+ virtual choir performances recorded. No Winter Concert.

7

The pandemic hit the music program especially hard and forced the entire program to move online, where latency complications meant that group singing was impossible. A new curriculum was quickly developed to allow for community development, musical skill building, singing from home, and recording projects that would provide music for Sunday services. These projects (as well as the existence of the music program in online form) would not have been possible without the dedication of its participants!



*Virtual Choirs, 2020 Edition*







First Unitarian will welcome a new Music Director in August 2021. From January up until August, the goals are growing the online music program, creating additional virtual projects, and preparing for the leadership transition.

## Spiritual Care

-Rev. Ellen Bell

My mandate is to provide a Spiritual Care presence to members of the congregation who request it and to also approach people who have been suggested as needing Spiritual Care by the Spiritual Care Council.



Traditionally, my work involved visiting people in person, in their residences, retirement homes, long-term care or hospital. In January and February, I made six visits, participated in one memorial service and in several meetings (Spiritual Care Council, Right Relations Team, Seniors' Planning, and staff meetings). Since the start of the Pandemic in March, all visits have been made by phone. There have been twenty-three phone visits, plus all the regular monthly meetings on Zoom. This has been somewhat less than previous years. This is primarily due to not quite optimum health of the Spiritual Care provider, due to effects of the Pandemic..

Restrictions due to COVID-19 have heavily impacted on my activities. Phone visits are not my preferred method of meeting but I have done my best. I have also been dealing with effects of the Pandemic which have caused me to be greatly fatigued and my chronic pain has been amplified.

With the hope that COVID-19 will be gone soon and I will be able to return to visiting in person.

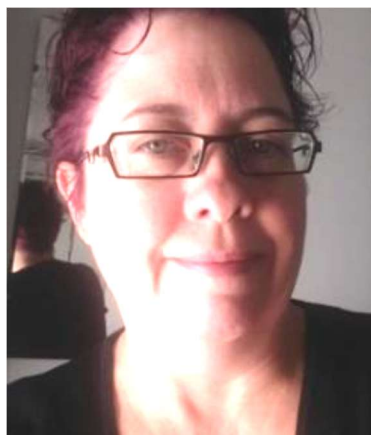


# Administration

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## Message from the President, Board of Directors

- Lisa Sharp, [president@firstunitarianottawa.ca](mailto:president@firstunitarianottawa.ca)



The past year has been unprecedented in many respects. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced most of us to cope with rapidly changing public health guidelines while at the same time having to learn new ways to do commonplace activities, including buying groceries online, working from home and attending school online. We continue to be in lockdown as of June 1, 2021.

The most profound change for FirstU was closing our building and moving to online church services, hospitality hour and meetings. Our dozens of committees and groups moved onto zoom within a short time period. It has now been over one year and we are still not able to open our doors as we wait for everyone to be fully

vaccinated in Ottawa. This year will be known as the year we created task forces! The Covid-19 and Zoom Task Forces were created to address emerging issues as we adapted.

Part of our adapting to new circumstances included hiring a Communications Coordinator. Our increased use of social media brought new persons to our weekly Hospitality Hours held online via Zoom. Interestingly, our new format allowed us to meet many more people than we normally would in person. In fact we had at least 8 new members join our congregation in the past year and some of our Sunday services have had over 500 people watch or view the recording on YouTube.

Although FirstU was not able to host large gatherings, we did host many special events online, including the Earth Speaks forums, and various special guests including the first ever Holtom Lecture to be held online. As well, we participated in trivia, played bridge, read Braiding Sweetgrass together – all online. We also, when permitted, met with other members for walks and at outdoor cafés and pubs.

SRCT working groups remained in touch and active, participating and supporting many community events. Our women's group and men's group have continued meeting.

Due to the Ottawa Public Health regulations, we had to cancel most of our special events as well as our rentals. We faced some financial challenges through loss of our major fundraisers such as the Fall Fair; but luckily we qualified for some government funding programs which



ensured that we made it through 2020 financially sound. We were forced to be innovative and come up with safe ways to raise funds. We launched an online auction which resulted in raising \$15,000 for our congregation.

FirstU committed to Climate Justice in 2019 and we continued this priority throughout this year by developing a plan for the Green Sanctuary program. Various education projects and guest speakers taught us about the current issues the earth is facing and what we can do to help.



*Board of Directors Retreat, 2020*

The pandemic had an impact on our staff as well. Both Jen and Michelle worked from home over the past year; taking turns visiting the office on a regular basis. Michelle has enabled us to obtain government funding in 2020; while Jen has provided direction and supporting our congregation to have a Zoom presence. Our custodians worked on many repairs and other projects to maintain the church building and grounds.

Gareth stepped up to support our online presence on YouTube and with our live streaming of Sunday Services.

Neo has continued to support our families with online stories and activities, Zoom get-togethers as well as outdoor outings.

Our Director of Music, Deirdre Kellerman decided to put off her departure for a year, providing ongoing support to our choirs and Sunday services. We appreciated Deirdre's assistance in recruiting her replacement who will start in the fall of 2021.

Our developmental minister, Reverend Patricia Guthmann Haresch (Rev. Pat), was on her way to complete her third and final year with us, and as you will hear from her, together, we have accomplished so much. Having Rev. Pat support and guide us as we navigate through COVID times has been a blessing. Her calm and steady presence, her focus on meeting the needs of our congregants while supporting our staff and volunteers, and her continual reminders that we are living in VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) times and need to relax and go with the flow, have been greatly needed and appreciated.

Despite the pandemic, we made the decision to bring an Intern Minister to Canada. Our Intern, E.N. Hill made a significant impact on our congregation while also working with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa. Many of our members took further steps towards dismantling racism by participating in E.N.'s "Kyriarchy" program.





We hold in our thoughts all of those who have faced hardship and ongoing isolation over the past year. This includes people of all ages, including our friends, families and colleagues. Things have been most difficult for those who live alone, and those who are raising children at times when schools and daycares were closed for months at a time. I want to thank our Caring Committee for stepping up and ensuring that over 300 people were getting regular calls to do wellness check-ins.

With respect to our leaders, there are many shining stars among us – and we appreciate the fact that most of our leaders have not stepped back during the pandemic; rather, they have rolled up their sleeves and learned how to become Zoom hosts!

Many of First U's leaders found ourselves on church-related Zoom meetings 3 or 4 times every week including evenings and on the weekend. I'd like to thank all of our Committee, Working Group and Team leads; as well as all of the members of the Board of Directors for all of their efforts to keep our community alive and well during what has been an extraordinarily challenging year.

Finally, in June 2020, we recruited and empowered a seven-person Search Committee who embarked on an incredible year-long journey together. The congregation appreciates all of their hard work; we had the pleasure of meeting our new settled Minister, Rev Eric Meter. As we await his arrival in summer 2021, we look forward to being together again in our Sanctuary.

11

## Operations, Finance and Facility Management

*-Jen Brennan, Operations Manager; Michelle Jackson, Finance Manager;  
Lori Clarke, Facility Manager; Gareth Auden-Hole, Sound and Light Coordinator*

We learned very quickly in mid-March how to kindle, inspire, nurture and create from afar. Most staff set up their home offices as satellites of FirstU Ottawa. The custodians continued to care for the church space, working their shifts alone in the building. As Rev. Pat said, in this unusual circumstance, everyone involved in the FirstU community changes gears to prioritize taking care of one other.

We immediately changed to virtual meetings, meaning a learning curve for staff to set up the infrastructure and schedule these meetings ASAP. It was amazing and commendable how quickly the platform was embraced and learned by everyone, and special thanks to member Mary Ella Keblusek for taking on most of the training of the congregation.

We created pandemic protocols, again researching and learning quickly the best course of action to keep everyone safe, to keep our insurance valid, and keep the building in good repair while no one frequented it. We created the FirstU VIRUS Task Force to discuss and agree on protocols based on current provincial guidelines.



Michelle quickly became an expert on all Government COVID programs for which we qualified, which netted the church extra income which helped keep us afloat.

In 2020, we had to keep the heat continuously during the cooler seasons, but electricity consumption for lighting was significantly reduced. The lack of programming and rentals meant there were less office and custodial expenses, but also of course, less revenue.

With introduction of online recorded services, Deirdre took on the huge task of post-production and when livestreaming was allowable, Gareth stepped up to ensure a seamless and professional experience for our community viewers.

I think our short-term goals as staff going forward are to return to 30 Cleary, and learn to integrate again as a team. Long-term we will learn to work with our new Minister Rev Eric and continue to keep the



## Archives

*-Brian Cowan*

Due to Covid-19, from mid-March to mid-September I had no access to the church, and from mid-September to year-end my hours at the church were reduced by about half. So, 2020 was not as productive as previous years. Nonetheless, some work was done organizing and cataloging material both physically and digitally within the areas of our administrative office, our religious exploration office, our finance/human resources office, and our basement archives room. Our In Memoriam data was kept current

as was all of the digital data (within spreadsheets) which appears in various church computers and back-up flash drives.

Church closure time reduced the productivity of archival work in 2020 and there is more closure time in 2021. Nonetheless, I believe, we are, little by little, moving closer to an ideal situation in which everything is in an assigned and known place. Our searchable Excel spreadsheets are proving to be an invaluable help in finding our thousands of archived documents dating back more than 120 years. My present plan is to concentrate on our finance/human resources office --- completing the cataloging there and helping out in the preservation of committee, team, and group meeting minutes.

My aim is to get our archival system free of backlog and onto an “ongoing maintenance basis”. Another two years may accomplish this. Then we might consider supplementing our paper archiving with digital archiving. We might also wish to think about how to preserve some of our videos over the long term (100 years and more). We have photos over 100 years old. Why not some videos preserved into the next century and beyond?



# Committees of the Board

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## Campus Planning Committee (CPC)

*-Terry Kimmel, chair*

Our mandate is to assist the Board and the Congregation by studying, providing advice and making recommendations for policies and plans related to campus planning. This committee is guided by a document approved by the Congregation in 2018 titled “Goals and Guiding Principles for Development of the Unitarian Campus”.

In spite of Covid-19 the committee met by Zoom with regularity in an effort to address the objectives of its 2020 plan. The CPC drafted a new charter that was accepted by the Board, continued to refine a site plan (identifying locations for possible future buildings), met with several social housing organizations, engaged Cahdco (a not-for-profit developer of social housing) to guide the committee through a process of understanding elements of building social housing on the campus, identified a location for a possible first building for affordable housing, commissioned an ecological asset report, met with the congregation on a few occasions, developed ideas re: building ownership and rent, and had several meetings with Unitarian House (UH) about identifying a site on campus for a new UH. The CPC also discussed with the Board a visioning process for campus development to be led by the Board. This process was scheduled for early 2021. Began working on a motion for the 2021 AGM.

One would think that Covid-19 would be an issue for the committee but it really wasn't. We managed to continue our internal meetings by Zoom as well as meetings with potential partners and consultants. It is recognized that what we have embarked on is a complex set of issues and a process that cannot be rushed. The CPC has been deliberate in its approach towards understanding various aspects of development on the campus and the realities of trying to balance the congregation's social responsibility objectives with its environmental and web of life principles. We have worked hard at hearing the various voices that have specific opinions about how to develop the campus and factoring them into our thinking. Final decisions will always rest with the congregation. Campus development has grown to include what we might consider as a holistic approach to the total campus to include green spaces, playgrounds, meditation spaces, food gardens and gathering places.

With the approval of the congregation we will begin (and possibly complete) a feasibility study with Cahdco to determine if affordable housing can be built on our campus in accordance with the various criteria we have identified. We will also begin planning the campus of the future with input from the congregation's visioning process.





## Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM)

-Mary Ella Keblusek and Eva Berringer

The mandate of the CoSM is to coordinate FirstU's various ministries to ensure they are effective and are meeting the needs of the congregation. The CoSM does this by monitoring congregational life, coordinating the work of ministry teams, undertaking periodic assessments of programs and supporting congregational leadership development.

The CoSM has continued to use the Leadership Council (LC) as a key vehicle for coordinating the congregation's ministries, to deepen connections among leaders and to share ideas on areas of mutual interest. The January 2020 Council meeting featured a world-café style discussion on leadership pathways and leadership development. The focus shifted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and monthly LC meetings held in the spring of 2020 allowed leaders to share how their role had changed during Covid-19, what supports they needed, to consider more deeply the impact of living in VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) times. During the fall, the CoSM turned its attention back to volunteer engagement, and LC meetings encouraged leaders to consider how they communicate the work of their team/group and how we can more effectively recruit and engage volunteers.

The achievements of the CoSM over the past year are directly attributable to the dedication of its members - Rev. Pat, Colleen Glass, Sherri Watson and Brent Nicolle (Board liaison).

However, if the CoSM is to fully meet its mandate, including assessing the effectiveness of individual ministries, additional members will be required. The CoSM is also looking forward to discussions with Rev. Eric about the mandate of the CoSM and the role that he sees it playing.

The CoSM's goals for 2021 include:

- Continuing to support the Leadership Council as a prime vehicle for coordinating the congregation's various ministries. Meetings will continue to be held at least quarterly.
- Continuing to develop our volunteer and leadership pathways, including identifying and developing resources to support movement along the pathways.
- Assessing the achievement of developmental ministry priorities and providing input to the Minister's evaluation.
- Developing a multi-year plan for the periodic assessment of the congregation's various ministries.



Live-streamed Lighting the Chalice



## Communications and Outreach Committee

*-Guy Belleperche*

We assist the Board in ensuring effective communications within and external to the Congregation by assisting in the development and implementation of coordinated internal communications plans and processes, and outreach communications strategies, plans and actions, and by monitoring the effectiveness of these activities to determine any required changes.

The committee focused on improvements to the FirstU website, better and more coordinated use of our social media platforms, assisting FirstU groups and teams in using Zoom for remote meetings and events, advising the Board on Communications-related issues, supporting staff in the execution of their Communications related duties, and defining the position and assisting with the hiring of a new Communications Coordinator. As the committee had only recently been reconstituted, and had to pivot early in the year (along with all of FirstU) due to COVID-19, activities and achievements met expectations but could not be compared to prior years.

Additional non-Board members on the committee would be beneficial, both for core work and for C&O participation with other Committees, Groups and Teams. In addition to three board members and staff, there is only one non-Board member of the committee – this makes assigning tasks and progressing work difficult. Despite this, lots of good work was done, but more members would allow even more work.

15

Continue work on Communications policy documents, assist with refining our social media use and our website, support the new Communications Coordinator and the Operations Manager in their Communications functions, look for opportunities to publicize our events to increase FirstU's visibility in the community, recruit more committee members, and work with other Committees, Groups and Teams to make our internal communications clearer and more consistent.

## Embracing Diversity Committee (EDC)

*- Justine De Jaegher, chair*

EDC's mandate is to assist FirstU "to be an intentionally welcoming and inclusive community, both within the Congregation itself and in its engagement with the broader community." By making our space feel more welcoming to people of all identities and backgrounds, we are consistent with FirstU's mission of creating a "[...] just and compassionate world."

This year's activities were similar to the Committee's two previous years except that they were virtual. We again hosted a Pride service and a Pride week event. Last year it was a film screening and this year it was an interfaith panel with queer clergy, which was well received. We also hosted a forum on anti-racism with Councillor Rawlson King. Having Intern Minister, E.N. Hill, greatly enhanced our capacity. While we did not present the Beyond Tolerance



workshop this year, E.N. hosted the No More Kyriarchy series. Finally, we worked to develop a Welcoming Guide.

Having champions for our committee in Ministry (Rev. Pat and E.N.) who support our work greatly contributed to our success.

Sometimes the Committee lacked the capacity to accomplish everything we wanted to. So, having additional members with time and energy could help contribute to our success. We also sometimes got bogged down in congregational bureaucracy. At one point we were asked to consider how we might restructure into other groups at FirstU and then after much consideration, the plan was reversed. Having more organizational clarity that would allow us to focus on the work we want to do, would also contribute to our success.

We want to publish and promote the Welcoming Guide and develop a FirstU 2SLGBTQ+ group. We also want to continue to organize Pride events and develop stronger relationships with community organizations including anti-racist organizations. We will try to again support a community group through fundraising. When in person events are allowed again we would like to do a BreakOut theatre workshop. Until then we will explore continuing education for the congregation on diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Finance Committee

*- Justine De Jaegher, chair*

The mandate of the Finance committee is to “Assist the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to financial matters” (Governance Manual, Appendix 1.2), and therefore oversees the financial resource base required to achieve our mission and charitable purpose.

We reviewed and approved a draft 2021 operating budget and monitored changes to 2020 budget actuals in the context of lost revenues (in particular rentals and fundraising) resulting from COVID-19. We received updates on applications for government funds through the CEWS and CEBA programs. We continued our Financial Policies review - a process initiated under the previous Treasurer - to recommend changes to the Financial Policy book as a whole (still to be finalized and adopted). We recommended the rebalancing of funds between Legacy Fund - Unrestricted (i.e. internally restricted) and Legacy Fund - Endowment (i.e. externally restricted) in accordance with the 2012 Legacy Fund Policy.

Given the workload associated with the Finance Committee, it may be worth reviewing its current Charter to expand the number of committee members. A cohesive, cloud-based document management system with shared access by staff and committee leads could also help a great deal with document version tracking, and quick access to minutes and policies in a central location. With the current inactivity of the Stewardship Committee, it will be important to establish which parts of that committee’s mandate will now fall to the Finance Committee and which will fall to the Committee on Shared Ministry and other groups.





The group aims to finish its financial policy review, in consultation with Rev. Eric, and make recommendations to the Governance Committee, and ultimately to the Board. The group also intends to form budget and fundraising teams to focus the work of committee members in the development of the 2022 annual budget and in fundraising initiatives above and beyond (but perhaps with assistance to) the annual Pledge Campaign.

## Governance Committee

*-Guy Belleperche, chair*

The Governance Committee assists the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to, governance matters.

The Governance Committee has been focused on reviewing and updating our existing governing documents and policies, developing new policies where required, updating the Governance Manual to reflect changes to governance structures and Committee, Group and Team roles and responsibilities, and continuing work on revising our Charitable Purposes and updating our Articles of Incorporation.

- 17 Additional members on the committee would be beneficial, as policy work is very detail oriented, and having extra hands to do the work, and extra eyes to review, is always helpful.

We continue work on updating the Governance Manual, reconciling our various policy documents, updating our charitable purposes, and updating our Articles of Incorporation.

## Nominating Committee

*- Joseph Connor*

We were mandated to nominate four individuals for appointment to the Board of Directors. On April 15th we submitted four individuals to the Board: for officer positions, Justine De Jaegher to be appointed as a Director at the next Board meeting and be elected as Treasurer at the June 2020 AGM for a 3-year term, and Caycee Price be appointed as Director at the next Board meeting and be elected as Secretary at the June AGM for a 2 year term. We also proposed two individuals be appointed as Members at Large at the June AGM: David Chernushenko for a 3-year term, and Irvin Waller for a 2-year term.

Early in 2020 the Nominating Committee did extensive advertising seeking individuals willing to be on the Board. Articles in the e-UU, the Spire and notices in the Sunday Orders of Service accompanied one to one requests by Committee members. We received many more Nos than Yeses. We are pleased the four candidates we recommended represent the skill set, experience, generation, and gender balance that our congregation needs.



## Personnel Committee

*-Chuck Shields, chair*

We assist the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to personnel general practices and policies. The committee also provides assistance, as requested, to staff regarding personnel matters.

The committee's main task during the year, at the request of the Board and minister, was the review and revision of the congregation's approach to performance reviews for staff and the minister. In addition to creating a performance review form and process for the developmental minister, the committee identified the components that would be appropriate for performance review of the next settled minister.

In 2020 the committee:

- began work on a compensation study of the congregation's staff positions.
- continued work toward the development of a statement regarding employee use of social media to add to the Employee Handbook and the congregational policy regarding social media.
- provided advice to the minister and staff regarding a range of issues that they brought forward.
- added two new members.
- through the chairman, maintained contact with the Board at regular points during the year to check whether there were issues it wanted the committee to address.
- had begun using Zoom for occasional meetings in 2019 so was able to move quite easily to having all meetings on that platform. Much of the committee's work in past years had been conducted via email, so the pandemic didn't have tremendous impact on its work. Staff preoccupation with more pressing issues stimulated by the pandemic kept the committee from completing a statement regarding employee use of social media.

The committee plans on completing the staff compensation study. Members of the committee are interviewing comparable congregations in the Ottawa area and they will integrate this with information found in other applicable compensation studies and will, with the involvement of the Manager of Finance and Human Resources, draft a report for FirstU.

Our plans going forward include drafting a policy regarding staff acceptance of gifts from congregants, vendors, or others, and we will assist, as requested, with the orientation of the new settled minister.

## Settled Minister Search Committee (SMSC)

*-Jane Lindsay, Chair*

In 2020, the committee conducted the first three of seven required phases in the UUA's North American-wide minister search process in order to recommend to the congregation in April 2021 the "best fit" applicant to be its next Settled Minister. After 5 years of interim and



developmental ministry the congregation is ready for a permanent minister to inspire and lead us in pursuing our mission and charitable purposes in a sustained manner.

The work of the SMSC in 2020 was to: earn the trust of the congregation, engage it in the search process, and represent FirstU to ministers in the wider world of Unitarian Universalism. The main expected and achieved activities involved were: identification of the congregation's expectations, concerns, and priorities concerning its next Settled Minister; keeping the congregation informed about the search; preparation of a draft contract for the Settled Minister; and, to inform and attract applicants, preparing, and posting online, a video tour of our church and campus, a Congregational Record, and a packet of related documents. With the exception of the video tour, these activities were similar to ones in FUO's last two search processes but had more detailed elements because the search system had been made more rigorous in recent years. Also, all aspects had to be conducted according to Covid-19 safety measures.

The SMSC's work was aided by: early guidance and responsive support from the UUA Transitions Team, as well as the coach it assigned to us; enthusiastic perspectives about FirstU from our Developmental Minister; and the sounding board role played by FirstU's last SMSC chair. Our work was also facilitated by: our having a team committed to our purpose and to working well together on it, a member who led a fulsome communications strategy, a member with professional experience in survey methodology, and several members able to work long hours to prepare the final Congregational Record and documents packet.

We will: select applicants to interview by using criteria derived from our Congregational Record and survey, conduct first-round interviews and reference checks, agree on a short list of pre-candidates for intensive assessment (pre-candidating) weekends, conduct these weekends, agree on the one minister we wish to have as our candidate, and introduce this candidate to the congregation in a candidating week of events. Our goal is to have at least 90% of voting members agree on May 2, 2021 to call this candidate as our Settled Minister.

## Stewardship Committee

*-Larry Jones, chair*

Stewardship is a year-round function focussed on recognizing, nurturing, and celebrating GENEROSITY in all its forms within our congregation and community towards enabling our covenant.

Data-driven and project-oriented, Stewardship supports cross-functional and congregant engagement and provides an objective basis for evaluating our community dynamics and diversity, along with analysis and measures for effective governance and Sustainable Finances.





In 2020 we:

- Successfully planned and completed the 2021 Pledge Campaign with regular reporting – mostly met the financial target: reduced number of Pledges corresponding to the reduced numbers of ACTIVE Members.
- Prepared and presented the 2021 Pledge Campaign Report to the Board, showing the clear decline in both Pledge totals and number of ACTIVE Members from 2012 to present.
- Due to the COVID-19 shutdown of FirstU, all planned or intended fun and fundraising projects or initiatives were suspended.
- Continued development of a multi-year 'standard' for data collection and Metrics Reporting for the Pledge Campaigns using historical data.
- Furthered work on the Multi-Gen Profile Project, including Health Dashboard concept Program Development with reporting on indicators such as Service Attendance, Attrition, Pledging History & forecasting, etc.



# Fundraising

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## Fall Fair

*-Carol Card, chair*

Our mandate is to hold a bazaar run by volunteers that will raise funds for the operations of the church, build community within and beyond the congregation, disperse unsold donations to charitable organizations, and put our environmental principles into practice in dealing with waste and recyclables.

The pandemic disrupted our traditional Fall Fair model, and various alternatives were considered over the spring, summer in consultation with the Board and staff. The evolving COVID-19 situation and the need for caution led to no decision being taken for a few months. In the fall, we decided to partner with Bytown Auctioneers to organize an online auction. The work was mainly done by the Fall Fair Silent Auction team, following strict health protocols. Donations of valuable items were collected over a six-week period, and the successful auction took place in early 2021.

- 21 I think we all did the best we could in the circumstances (COVID-19). Lots of creative ideas came forward, some of which may be implemented in the future. The online auction model for 2020 meant that only the first of our four goals could be met: fundraising but not community-building, recycling or goods dispersal.

Having a knowledgeable, well-organized auction team, along with the professional services and promotion from Bytown Auctioneers, definitely contributed to the auction's success. The level and quality of donations was very good.

We don't know at this time what Fall Fair 2021 will look like, but we hope to have at least some kind of community sale(s). The tents recently purchased by the congregation open up some interesting outdoor-sale possibilities. We also plan to repeat the online auction experience and will be soliciting items further ahead, refining our processes and involving more volunteers.



# Teams

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## Adult Learning Team

*-Wendy Doyle, Chair*

We promote learning for all ages as a fundamental spiritual practice in our community, with intention, willingness and forethought. We coordinate and manage the structure and process of providing learning opportunities for adults consistent with the mission and charitable purposes of the congregation.

The following groups continued their meetings on Zoom:

- Bridge, Mindfulness Meditation, Monday and Friday Reading for Growth, Spirituality and Philosophy, UU Writers and Women's Personal Growth.
- Empower Dance met personally before the lockdown. One new group, the Poetry Reading Group, was formed.
- The Knitters' Group met for discussion on Zoom, and did their knitting and crocheting at home. They were limited because they could not access yarn and other items in their cupboard at the church.
- Arts Night, the BookShelf and the 55+ Program will resume when the church is again open.
- Unfortunately, Gentle Yoga and Painters Circle will not continue.

Every group using Zoom found it was a good way to continue meeting and some even got some new members. However, Zoom was difficult for people with only phone access and for the hard of hearing.

Several groups thought they may continue using Zoom to meet during the winter months.

After the church reopens, Mindfulness Meditation and the Friday Reading group wondered if it will be possible to combine in-person meetings at the church with Zoom meetings for those who want access from home.

The Monday Reading for Growth group is currently attempting to recruit more members.

We will all work together to follow the Pandemic requirements and each group will decide how to continue meeting once the church is open.



## Caring Network Executive

*-Alexandra Devine, chair*

The Caring Network's responsibility to encourage and nurture a caring presence within the congregation is designed to strengthen bonds among members and friends, help them find needed supports and celebrate joys. Closer ties among congregants and support for personal needs encourages all to participate more fully in First Unitarian life.

The scope of our activities in 2020 was definitely narrowed by the physical restraints of the Covid-19 closures and restrictions. Volunteer Contacts remained in place and information and assistance was shared through phone and email. After February, our ability to provide drives or visiting, or provide Memorial Service Receptions, was much reduced; phone visits became more important, and information on how to stay connected with groups and Sunday events was sought for those unfamiliar with online resources.

Activities included:

- approximately 60 Caring Cards sent, but lacking the usual multiple signatures
- a single Memorial Service Reception was provided
- staffed one February Coffee Hour, honouring Heart Month near Valentine's Day
- cards and/or plants delivered at Christmas season to many isolated or experiencing illness or bereavement
- celebrated Volunteer Week - Thank You cards created and sent to our Monthly Contacts

The newly arranged system of many volunteer callers (outside our Network system) contributed to communication among congregants, enabling many to keep in touch with others during periods of isolation. Continued participation varied, but many enjoyed the calls and benefited by sharing thoughts and remaining aware of activities and sources of help within First Unitarian. The Ministers were very active in support of the Caring Network throughout the year, responding to requests for calls or visits suggested by Caring Contact conversations and by Calling Volunteers. Our continued liaison with the Spiritual Care Council and the Office was essential.

Goals for 2021 include: continuance of our contact system in 2021, recruiting additional Caring Contacts and arranging a workshop for current and future participants; exploring new methods of communication, perhaps incorporating ideas from 2020 with our usual patterns. It will be good to be back in Worship Hall on Sundays and able to exchange news with many more easily.

## Denominational Affairs Team (DAT)

*-Maury Prevost, Chair*

The Team's mandate is to connect our congregation and its members to other UUs and their activities in Canada and around the world, especially through the Canadian Unitarian Council





(CUC). These connections strengthen the congregation's ability to fulfill its mission and charitable purposes beyond just the local community.

The DAT plan for 2020 did not anticipate the pandemic, but most expected activities were accomplished. We had the "Sharing Our Faith" service and offering on February 23. The key changes were cancelling the CUC national conference in Halifax in May and any in-person regional fall gatherings. Instead, the CUC organized online national gatherings and Sunday worship services May 15-17 and November 13-15 and significantly expanded its online programming. The DAT promoted these and other CUC activities to people in our congregation and continued to share CUC news. At least 18 people from our congregation participated in the November 13-15 national gathering.

The CUC was several years ahead of the curve in using Zoom, which benefited all congregations, for example how we did the FirstU 2020 AGM online in June. The cancellation of the national conference meant that the DAT did not need any of its 2020 budget allocation.

The DAT is responsible for quite a few activities that recur annually, so plans for 2021 will be very similar to actual activities in 2020. We already knew by the end of 2020 that the 2021 CUC national conference will be entirely online. The Chair will be looking for a successor to take over at the beginning of 2022.

24



## Lay Chaplaincy Team

*-Bob Armstrong, chair*

The CUC Lay Chaplaincy program is an OUTREACH program that is unique to Canada. Lay chaplains are trained to officiate passage of life rituals. We serve primarily persons outside of our UU community. The Ottawa Lay Chaplaincy Committee is joint with the UUFO to present a common face of UU to the larger community.

- The number of rituals performed was significantly reduced by COVID-19. We officiated only 8 memorials and 4 weddings.
- Nicki Bridgland has completed her 6-year term as a lay chaplain and is retired from the position.
- The CUC Lay Chaplain Committee (LCC) has approved a one-year extension for Alex Campbell.
- FirstU approved Lisa Boulay as a new lay chaplain. She completed the required basic training course (online) and has now received her provincial license to officiate marriages.
- Evangeline Danseco of the UUFO is in her second year as a lay chaplain.
- The lay chaplains will be called upon to officiate some rituals online.
- The CUC LCC is developing online training covering the design and delivery of online rituals.

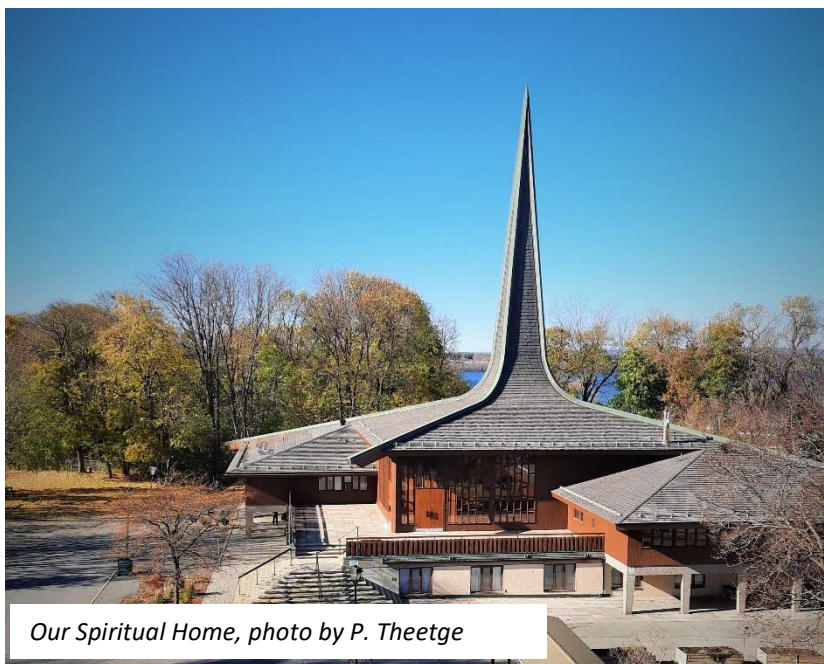
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## Property Team

*-currently no chair; contact Ron Doyle or Jen Brennan*

Our mandate is to ensure that the building and property are functional, safe and aesthetically pleasing. This helps to provide a suitable facility where many of the activities of the congregation can take place.

As usual, the Team met every two months. The Team reviewed the status and condition of the Property and work done to date, and made plans for the coming months and year.



*Our Spiritual Home, photo by P. Theetge*



Project work of note which was completed included brighter, more efficient, LED lighting in the parking lots.

Starting about March of 2020, the maintenance staff was reduced as the building was closed. A significant amount of the remaining staff time was devoted to cleaning and refurbishment which is normally done only once in several years. Thus, the condition of the building has been improved. Examples of such improvements are:

- complete stripping and waxing of the Lower Level
- extra work outside on the grounds, not usually doable during the busier seasons
- refurbishing of Room 6
- staining of wooden baseboards

Planning continued for Spiritual Home Campaign projects, such as Air Conditioning for Fellowship Hall, but the work itself is being deferred until the Covid-19 restrictions are reduced. The A/C is now expected to be installed in the summer or fall of 2021.

The Team will seek direction from the Board regarding any particular work or issues which the Board would like to see addressed.

26

## Right Relations Team (RRT)

*-Lisa Boulay, Chair*

The Right Relations Team assists the congregation and staff of FirstU in fostering and maintaining harmonious relations within the congregation. The RRT mitigates conflict through education and training. RRT members may be called upon to facilitate/mediate conflicts between individuals/groups.

Highlights January-December 2020

- The RR Team worked on the new Relational Covenant with multiple inputs from the congregation and several presentations.
- The motion to vote on the Relational Covenant was successfully affirmed at the June 2020 AGM.
- The Board subsequently requested the RRT edit the Congregational Covenant to take any language that was now part of the Relational Covenant out and to refresh the wording of the Congregational Covenant.
- RRT consulted with Rev. Pat, the Environmental Action Committee, and the Embracing Diversity Committee to ensure that the language of the revised Congregational Covenant was appropriate.
- RRT presented the revised Congregational Covenant to the Board in the fall.
- Two members of the RRT attended the CUC course on Conflict Resolution in September 2020.



- While we were not referred any conflict situations last year we did informally negotiate one potential situation.
- The RR team continues to meet via Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The RR team successfully met throughout the year, virtually by Zoom, which improved our ability to have full attendance at meetings. We feel that we met our goals very well, in spite of the restrictions on meeting in person. We will continue to discuss RRTs role and develop it with the support of the new incoming minister.

The RR Team is in the process of designing consent forms for mediation and will work with the incoming minister on this project.

## Welcome and Membership Team (W&M)

*-Carol Card, acting chair*

The Welcome & Membership Team helps ensure FirstU's sustained vitality by welcoming newcomers and congregants, supporting them to feel connected and engaged with our community and helping those who wish to do so to become members.

27 With the COVID-19 shutdown of the church building in March, our welcoming and other roles mostly moved online. Jane Lindsay, W&M Chair, worked hard with others to develop a defined format and roles for the new virtual Hospitality Hour; W&M added the Welcomer role and recruited people for that and the Emcee roles.

In July 2020, when Jane became Chair of the Settled Minister Search Committee, Carol Card took over as Acting Chair of W&M. All enquiries for information were responded to, and a number of new members were helped through the application process. At the end of the year, planning started for a virtual newcomers/new members' event (held in early March 2021).

The ongoing strong support from the office staff is appreciated. The Acting Chair and team did not initiate significant new initiatives. Several members of the W&M team have either been very committed to other congregational tasks or less engaged since the start of COVID-19. As a result, there was less energy in the team to take charge of individual tasks, other than supporting membership application processes and following up with newcomers. Recruiting some new members and having an active chair will be important to be able to expand the team's work.

Goals include updating the membership information on the FirstU website, developing information packages for newcomers and new members, and following up with new members to ensure that they feel connected at FirstU.





## Worship Associates

*-Rev. Pat Haresch*

The Worship Associates assist the Minister in planning Sunday Services and support ceremonial and liturgical elements during services. Worship Associates take the lead in supporting and facilitating services during the summer.

During COVID-19 times, Worship Associates smoothly and courageously shifted from in-person services to providing recorded contributions. Adjusting as well to participating in Zoom and livestreamed services where the Worship Team needed to remain distanced and masked and take cues from “the control room.”

In the fall of 2021, the Worship Associates will be adjusting to restricted in-person worship services and transition with whatever new vision will come with a new Minister and Music Director.

28



*Live-streamed Mitten Tree Service, December 6, 2020*



# Social Responsibility

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## Social Responsibility Council (SRC) & SR Coordinating Team (SRCT)

*-Sherri Watson, chair*

The Social Responsibility Coordinating Team mandate is to support and coordinate Social Responsibility activities based on our Unitarian Universalist principles, FirstU Congregational Mission and Priorities through the SRCT and eight Working Groups—Child Haven, Environmental Action, Global Justice, Indigenous Relations, Mental Health, Poverty Action, Refugee, and Unitarian GoGos.

The year 2020 unfolded like no other. The year began with confidence and commitment to implement Work Plans and enhance communications and integration within the Congregation. COVID-19 created new demands and challenges including changing many interactions from being in person to being by text and Zoom, cancelling congregational and fundraising events, and the need to respect public health requirements. In October, the Chair transitioned from Ed Willer to Sherri Watson. The Indigenous Relations Group went on hiatus in September due to many of its members moving to serve on the Ministerial Search committee; some ongoing work was undertaken by Global Justice.

Despite the “impediments” described above, there were achievements and successes as described by the Working Groups. The primary reasons were the commitment and determination of congregants to carry on in community despite the challenges. We also realized the importance of communications especially the invaluable role of the e-UU and the Spire. The impediment of meeting on Zoom was partly balanced by people being able to be part of the conversation despite distances or the weather. For the future, some form of “hybrid” meetings may be of benefit.

The Working/Action Group’s 2021 work plans are similar to previous years and are only mildly inhibited by Covid-19 restrictions. However, the SRCT budget falling short of requests, a large number of groups some with too few members, aging members, the intersectionality of issues (e.g. Green Sanctuary) and a new minister arriving in the summer all encourage looking at different ways SRCT can work together. Hopefully this will grow collaboration and bring new life to community outreach.

## Global Justice Working Group

*-Anita MacLean and Sharen Bowen*

Our goal of justice and human rights also includes climate action and respecting Indigenous rights in Canada and in the rest of the world.

In spite of the Covid-19 crisis, we were able to share the following events during 2020:



- January: we had a person from Elizabeth Fry Society talk about The Injustices in our Prisons at a Breakfast Forum.
- February: Anita MacLean spoke about the Plight of the Palestinian Children, also at a Breakfast Forum.
- March: Gustavo Frederico talked about his experiences working for 7 months at a UN Refugee Center in Brazil at the border to Venezuela where 8,000 refugees lived.
- Also in March, Sharen Bowen talked about the Indigenous Offenders Initiative. She also mentioned that many prisoners are suffering from Fetal Alcohol Disorder.
- June: Cindy Blackstock, ED of The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society was our speaker on the last Sunday of June. The topic was Child of “The First Protesters”.
- September: our event was called Home Grown Racism Indefinite Detention. It was a big success where Moe Harkat’s lawyer Barbara Jackman, Matthew Behrenz and Tim McSorley and Azeezah Kanji spoke.
- Also in September we hosted a Holtom Lecture to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations.
- November: we had a Webinar called Annexation with two speakers: The Jewish Professor Mira Zucharov and the Palestinian Human Rights Lawyer Jafa Jarrar. 90 people participated.
- Sharen Bowen talked about Food Security for Indigenous People and that program (named Ajashki) is still continuing at our congregation; we now have an Indigenous man Kayoki Whiteduck leading it.

## Environmental Action Group (EAG)

*-Mike Fletcher, chair*

Our mandate is to advocate for and undertake actions which preserve the natural world. The work aligns with the seventh UU principle, “Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we’re a part.” Also, as environmental degradation is affecting the vulnerable in the human community more greatly than most, there is increasing alignment with the second Unitarian principle, “Justice, equity and compassion in human relations”.

Having the climate crisis be the congregational focus has greatly increased the work of the committee. We spent a fair amount of the year planning and ultimately decided to focus on accreditation with the UUA Green Sanctuary 2030 program. This has a whole congregation commitment, including mitigation, adaptation and a new element of environmental justice and will continue after the end of the congregation’s climate focus. This has proven to be a heavy administrative burden, which has taken the dedication of a key member to complete. However, it has directed a more considered approach to planning.

There are several other developments that were interesting and may be a lesson for others:

- We split into a co-ordination body and the broader group. This is similar to the fall fair where there is a core group and the entire large team. Some people want to take on specific projects or have very defined interests and just want to pursue them with the EAG.



- Some people have risen spectacularly as leaders in the group to the point that I sometimes struggle to keep up and support them. What a great problem to have!

On the positive side, the congregation's response to Covid-19 was spectacular. Did we miss a beat because of it – not really! Also, the responsiveness of the Board and the minister was great; they set the bar for us.

As for impediments, campus planning was a drain on resources of the EAG; getting environmental concerns about campus development taken into account was more difficult than we would have liked.

There is still work to do in streamlining activism, which is being discussed with the Board president. Climate change is an existential threat to the globe so our advocacy should be bolder in demanding change. Green Sanctuary calls for activism not lower key advocacy and like past generations of Unitarians, we need to do what has to be done. The SRCT budgeting process has been identified as a siloed exercise among the various groups and this hopefully is going to be addressed next year.

Overall, the plan is to complete and implement the plan as developed under Green Sanctuary. We will work to further engage with the congregation and collaborate with other SRCT groups and organizations, make recommendations on lowering the carbon footprint of the church, continue and possibly expand the Ajashki Food Security Pilot project, and take up some activist pursuits. Key strategies to be employed include giving people as much latitude as possible to work on their interests, noting the difference between organizers and project doers and ensuring there is work for prospective volunteers.

31

## Indigenous Relations Working Group (IRWG)

*-Jane Lindsay & Mike Lloyd, co-chairs*

The IRWG supports reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through relationship building between FirstU and Indigenous individuals and organizations. We do this through direct interaction, education and being an ally or advocate. Our activities contribute to FirstU living its first and second Principles (i.e., respect for all and social justice), and, as a by-product of this, it's been appealing to people of all generations interested in being part of a spiritual community which actively pursues apolitical ways to promote and work for reconciliation in Canada.

Much of our work plan for 2020 did not get done because of the factors listed in the next section. Nonetheless, two of our members continued to explore with community partners (including the UUFO) the possibility of holding Circles for Reconciliation in Ottawa. Their work included bringing a new member into the community partnership who had extensive connection with the Inuit community and participation in virtual Circles for Reconciliation (each with 11 sessions) led by the leaders of the Winnipeg-based Circles for Reconciliation organization. Each circle had approximately half Indigenous and half non-Indigenous participants. In September 2020, we hosted the Sunday Forum "Trying to Make Sense of the





Indian Act: its continuing effect on Indigenous peoples, and why it is still in force” with guest speaker Kathryn Fournier.

Covid-19 was a significant impediment for our planned activities because a number of them required in-person engagement (i.e., holding a session of the Blanket Exercise, outreach to Indigenous communities to build interest in Circles for Reconciliation and consultation with Algonquin leaders and elders on how FirstU might develop and live a meaningful land and relationship acknowledgement). A further impediment was the “secondment” of 3 of our active members, including both our co-chairs, to the Settled Minister Search Committee from the end of June to the end of December, led the team members to decide to put the IRWG into a hiatus status for the final 6 months of the year. Given the hiatus status of the IRWG, no new goals or work plans were set for 2021.

## Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG)

*- Linda Goonewardene and Paul McGinnis*

The Mental Health Support and Action Group of First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa was formed primarily to support Ancoura’s mission, fundraise and promote awareness of mental illness. This mandate has broadened to include support to our congregants who live with a mental illness or to those who are caregivers for loved ones living with mental illness challenges.

We work towards heightening awareness of mental illness and mental health within FirstU. This is accomplished through education, partnerships with other groups, the promotion of mental health, the encouragement of governments and other decision makers to address, for example, the housing needs of people living with a mental illness, along with efforts to counter stigma and discrimination.

After some discussion, it was decided to change our name to Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG). This name encapsulates the dual function of the group.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the format and work of MHSAG this year. As soon as our building was closed, the group began meeting online via ZOOM. Attendance was greater than before the move on line, sometimes up to 10-12 participants, including three younger members. Given the pressures some members felt as COVID-19 took hold, it was decided to meet twice a month rather than the customary once per month.

MHSAG organized the following events and activities:

1. Sunday Service and follow up Q&A on October 15th. Dr. German Chiquy Alfonso from the Ottawa Dementia Society highlighted the challenges of the condition and the assistance the Ottawa Dementia Society can offer.
2. Sunday Forum in November 22nd. Dr. Chris Jones, Director of Ancoura presented an address entitled “A Place of Hope and Healing”.



3. Participation (ongoing) in a joint EAG- MHSAG photo project which addresses our emotional response to the challenges of climate change.
4. Sunday Service on August 16th. Johnnie Gall delivered a talk entitled “Mental Health Wellbeing during the Pandemic”.
5. Sunday service on July 19th. Carl Sonnen tackled the topic of “Living, Managing, Thriving with a Mental Health Disability.

It seems to be somewhat easier for new members of the group to join online. One member, for a time, was participating from Vancouver where she had moved temporarily. Once we are able to meet at the church again, it might be worth considering meeting in person and also enabling people who wish to join us online.

We will continue to offer support to our members and organize events, as appropriate. We will organize two sessions on the topic of caregivers – one for a Sunday Forum on June 27 and the other for a congregational service on July 25th. If the Fall Fair takes place, we are organizing and managing a “Tea Room” service. We will prepare in September our work plan for 2022.

## Poverty Awareness Action Group

*-Kathy Yach, chair*

33

Our mandate is to study and bring to the attention of the Congregation the concerns and needs of economically marginalized people in our community; to recommend special processes and criteria for deciding who will be supported; and to promote action on anti-poverty and affordable housing matters.

Because of coronavirus lockdowns we were not able to complete all of our plans. Nevertheless we continued, directly or virtually, to support several Indigenous aid projects for Oshkikizis women’s shelter and Shawenjeagamik Drop-in Centre; collect and deliver furniture donations to The Minwaashin Indigenous Women’s Support Centre, Capital Rainbow Refuge, smaller local refugee settlement groups and household groups; raise \$4556 in the annual Tulipathon for Multifaith Housing Initiatives at the end of May; support “Chew On This” Campaign marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty; participate with the Campus Planning Committee on building affordable housing and market rent housing on the FirstU campus; and raise \$1000 in support of our affordable housing from a Line Dancing event.

We had planned to host a couple of fund raising events that people could attend, but had to cancel them. In the end we hosted a Line Dancing event on Zoom.

Due to the Coronavirus we were very limited in what we could do. Everything we did was on Zoom or by email. We did not meet in person, so it was hard to market our mission. We will seek new volunteers in the new year, especially now, when/if we are approved by the SRCT to take on the Refugee Resettlement of a family from Syria. Hopefully we will not be in lockdown later this year.

We will continue to support the different groups we supported in 2020, continue to raise money for affordable and market rent housing on the FirstU campus, possibly through fund raising events. We will seek more volunteers. If the SRCT supports our motion to bring a family from Syria. We will seek new volunteers for this project and raise money if needed.



# Social Groups

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## Bridge Group

*-Brent Nicolle, chair*

The Bridge Group is a fellowship group: we build community with each other, and we practice learning and teaching playing skills in a respectful environment.

In early 2020, the group met monthly, in person, twice. After Covid-19 hit, we transitioned to meeting online using Zoom and an already existing online bridge program called BridgeBase Online. In fall 2020, sensing people's isolation, we opted to double our virtual event nights to twice per month.

During the September-May season (20/21), we met seventeen times. Average attendance was 12.5 attendees, nearly the same as the 13.0 attendees per session in the 19/20 in-person season. Nearly half of the attendees live alone, and everyone valued the social interaction during an otherwise isolating year with Covid-19.

34 Playing bridge on-line is both a hindrance and a boon. It is faster to handle cards, and it is easier to review and compare card-play. Playing on-line also represents an opportunity for attending during poor weather, or to appeal to players from beyond Ottawa (two regular players are from the London Ontario Fellowship). On the other hand, access to and familiarity with the required technologies remains a significant barrier for some would-be participants.

Non-members and guests are welcome to join the Bridge Group, which may be considered a stepping stone to FirstU membership.

We plan to continue playing on-line bridge over the summer. We will likely continue with a mix of online and in-person events (if possible) for the 2021/2022 fall-winter season.

## Empower Dance

*-Janet Clayton*

Our group offers a relaxed and intentional method of movement and meditation as healthy physical and mental exercise. We are not interested in dance instruction; rather, we value the chance to enjoy making our own choice of dance steps. Our music is varied and gives us the freedom to perform using the floor space to move, stretch or meditate, depending on our individual needs. We ask for a small donation of \$3 per week to provide a nominal fee for the use of the space but remain inclusive of those who may not have the funds to exercise in other venues.



The Covid-19 virus stopped us from using the Now Room at the Congregational building. A few of us formed our own “bubble” and have continued dancing each Wed. at a member’s home.

We hope that we can use the Now Room again on Wed. nights, from 7:30 pm till 9:00 pm when the building is allowed to reopen.

## Friends of the Meditation Gardens

*-Lori Snyder, chair*

FOMG have the following mission: we nurture the web of life by maintaining the Gardens as an outdoor sanctuary which provides spiritual and physical peace and renewal for all; builds connections among humans, plants, wildlife, water and soil; and celebrates the circle of life and death.

We continued to maintain the Gardens as best we could; Covid-19 restrictions limited the number of times we could go, and initially, the number of workers who could go. In addition to garden maintenance, we began construction of a removable watering system to facilitate easier and targeted watering. Lori Clarke did wonderful work in the North Garden and on the periphery of the property, and several residents of Unitarian House also came in their own time to volunteer.

We recruited a new and energetic volunteer and kept the previous ones, and mostly we seemed to have enough labour to go around. The weeds, including invasive species, are always threatening to overwhelm us, though. More volunteers have already been recruited for 2021.

As the long-term future of the Gardens is so uncertain, we will not undertake long-term projects. See above about pond walls. We will continue to do normal garden maintenance to the best of our collective ability, as well as repair or replace benches and complete the watering system.





## Knitters Group

*-Rosemary Bonyun and Coral Sato*

The year 2020 began as usual with the Crafty Crafters - Knitters getting together at the church every Wednesday to knit, chat and eat lunch together. Then in April the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown prevented us from gathering.

However, we have managed to keep in touch in a couple of ways. Every Wednesday, Coral Sato emails her "Greetings and Salutations" to us all, telling us of her activities, thoughts on world events, humorous anecdotes, etc.; in response, many of the knitters contribute their comments/thoughts on what was mentioned. Also, another member of the group, Maureen Amey, has taken the communication to a new level by organizing a Zoom meeting every second Wednesday to share ideas and get together virtually; this has the added advantage of being able to include a former member who has moved to BC.

There was no Fall Fair in November 2020, or other sales event at which we could sell our hand-made products. However, we donated 25 hats and mitts to the Aboriginal High School, and a number of mitts to the Snowsuit Fund; members of the Congregation donated over \$500 for mitts that were put on the Mitten Tree for the Snowsuit Fund.

36

Members of the group continue to enjoy producing knitted and crocheted items at home and keeping in touch as much as we can. However, we have been limited by generally being unable to access our supplies of yarn and other items in our cupboard at the church; we hope this will improve in the coming year.

## Reading for Growth - Monday

*-Katharine Elliott*

Our activities transitioned to Zoom very easily and effectively. Unfortunately, we lost two members this past year: Marilyn Prevost and Judy Hatt, which was a great loss in both cases. We meet every second Monday of the month as we have done for 16 years. Yes, we started in 2005 and this group has been very successful in meeting its goals this past year.

Our success has mainly been due to the fact that we have a wonderful intelligent membership. We have very lively discussions partly because we do not always agree with each other. The group is well co-ordinated in that a Book Line-Up is sent out after each meeting which means that members can order the books from the library and pause the hold for books that will not be taken up for months. We allow for each member 5 minutes to talk about the book without interruption, then we open up for a general discussion. The Chair keeps track of the time.

Actions to improve: We are now in the process of trying to recruit more members. We need to get out to the Congregation the existence of this group and convey the joy and self-improvement that comes from reading these books. We make an announcement in the three e-UUs prior to the Monday meeting of a particular book. Anyone interested in joining us, they will have three weeks to read the book. The Zoom link will be included in each announcement.



## Spiritual Growth Circle

*-Lisa Boulay, coordinator*

The Spiritual Growth Circle provides a space for members to explore their spirituality which is in line with the mission and purpose of the Congregation.

In the fall of 2018 Jane Lindsay and Donna Bowen-Willer co-facilitated a 10-week workshop: Enneagram and Spirituality. The Spiritual Growth Circle formed organically as the workshop ended and the group has been meeting monthly since then. Currently the group is a closed group and we will be exploring ways to open the group. Monthly meetings are loosely structured, and we use a variety of modalities to deepen our spirituality through a mind-body-spirit lens i.e. meditation, intuitive reflection, using resonant voice techniques, drumming, creating a labyrinth. Since March 2020 we have continued to meet monthly over Zoom.

The Spiritual Growth Group intends to continue to meet monthly and co-create each meeting with the members who are present.

## Voyageur Men's Group

*-Tom Rankin, chair*

Our goal of exploring in a supportive environment what it means to be a man in our present time and culture is still paramount. We look to our emotional and spiritual development and fellowship and share our life journeys as individual members in our 40s through our 70s.

Although unable to meet at the church or play our semi-annual role at Coffee Hour, or enjoy our semi-annual retreat at Harris Farm, we have continued with our bi-weekly meetings via Zoom, and have renewed our scheduled meetings at the church anticipating things opening up over the next few months.

We appreciate our origins in the Congregation and although only two of our present members are members of the congregation, we continue to make a financial contribution, even though we have been unable to meet at the church.

## Women's Personal Growth Group

*-Evelyn Algar, chair*

We explore, grow and also take care of our inner selves. As our inner strength grows we expand "taking care" into the congregation and beyond (the larger web of life). We contribute money collected to the Congregation at in-person meetings.

Members lead a wide variety of topics. Jan., Feb. and March we met monthly in the building on Wednesday evenings as usual. For our April meeting we switched nights due to fewer First U Zoom meetings on Mondays. Members overwhelmingly wanted to have more connection with



each other and support from each other in the early Covid-19 days, so May, June and July we met every 2 weeks by Zoom. August to December we reverted to monthly meetings still by Zoom. Fifteen meetings were held, instead of the usual 12. Without Zoom no meetings could have been held after March.

We met on Zoom with a steep learning curve for all especially the leader and using 3-4 different devices. Meeting on Zoom was good, but with no personal hugs and not everyone attending it was a difficult time for some of the members.

We hope we can meet in person to improve the connection.

Our goal is to meet again in person. Meeting on Zoom during the 3 winter months is an option. We expect Zoom to become a regular communication platform.



# Appendix A: Developmental Ministry Priorities, 2018-2021

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*-Rev. Patricia Guthmann Haresch, Developmental Minister*

## ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. DYNAMIC, HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Develop and foster culture of openness and acceptance

- Established active Embracing Diversity Committee (coordination of congregation-wide actions relating to inclusivity and openness in areas such as LGBTQ2S, varying abilities, multiple ages, class, ethnicity, immigration status)
- Established Committee on Shared Ministry to monitor progress on developmental ministry goals and to continue to support and assess the effectiveness of our programming. Leadership & Volunteer Engagement support among first priorities.
- Selection of a new congregational focus (2020-2024) that speaks to collective passion and encourages involvement – CLIMATE ACTION (includes process toward Green Sanctuary certification).
- Developed Relational Covenant and revised Congregational Covenant
- Website updates with an eye to welcoming newcomers and providing a pathway to Membership online
- Increased and encouraged greater involvement of members under 50 in leadership and volunteer positions
- Beginning discussion of framework for Reconciliation process
- Response to COVID-19 times led to some initiatives which will have an ongoing impact within the congregation:
- Rapid transition to on-line services and programming, encouraging teams, committees, and interest groups to continue their activities as a way of keeping congregants engaged and supported
- Ongoing exploration and implementation of best models for on-line and hybrid Sunday Services, meetings and presentations
- Established Connecting Calls during COVID-19 times to provide additional connection and support (winding down and considering transition with Caring Network)
- Mentored and supported the Intern Minister
- Established Search Team and finalizing search for new Music Director.

39





## 2. MULTI-AGE MINISTRY

Develop and foster programming and a culture that supports a broad range of ages

- Hired new DRE
- Developed RE model to engage both “active” and “reflective” children
- Provided youth activities (started OWL for middle school youth - - hope to continue post-COVID-19 restrictions, Coming of Age program for youth, participation in UU-UNO inter-generational webinar)
- Developed virtual and outdoor RE programming during COVID-19 times
- Plan for RE and Environmental Action Group to develop inter-generational RE programming together
- Encouraged and supported social and SRC events with activities for all ages and provided Zoom support for all groups
- Re-introduced Sunday morning forums and continued virtually during COVID-19 times, offered meaningful Chalice Groups (such as Braiding Sweetgrass-themed groups with materials provided by Rev. Pat), weekly virtual discussion group, and provided additional adult learning opportunities from the intern minister
- In addition to continuing Story Time for All Ages and welcoming little ones to stay with their families during Sunday Services, provided several Sunday Services for all ages and encouraged and welcomed youth participation

40

## 3. EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Develop and enhance elements and communication for effective governance

- Re-established an effective and vital Leadership Council that meets periodically during the year
- Starting the 5-Year Strategic Plan process
- Continuing Campus development considerations with opportunities for open discussion and clear communication
- Re-constitution of Communication & Outreach Committee and the hiring of a Communications Coordinator to support and increase effective on-line communication internally and broaden external community presence
- Developed a more consistent method of collecting and centralizing meeting minutes and attachments
- Reviewing, refining, and updating foundational policies and documents such as the governance manual, gaps in policies including financial policies, incorporation documents and charitable purposes
- Ongoing website, eUU, calendaring, and social media (especially Facebook) improvements not only for outreach, but to enhance internal communication
- Finalizing Settled Minister process

April 20, 2021



## Imagine

Imagine with me for a moment--  
don't worry, I'm not saying it's real.  
Imagine, if you can, that there has not  
been a calamity, but a great  
awakening.

Pretend, just for a moment, that we all  
so loved our threatened earth  
that we stopped going on cruises,  
limited international flights,  
worked on cherishing the places  
where we already are.

In this pretty fantasy, everyone who  
possibly can stops commuting.  
Spends extra time with their kids  
their pets or their garden.

We have the revelation that everyone  
needs healthcare, sick leave,  
steady work.

It occurs to us that healthcare workers  
are heroes. Also teachers.

Not to mention the artists of all kinds  
who teach us resilience and joy.

Imagine, if you will,  
that we turned to our neighbors  
in mutual aid, trading eggs  
for milk, checking in on those  
who are elderly or alone.

Imagine that each of us felt  
suddenly called to wonder  
*In this moment, what does  
the world need from me?*

*What are my gifts?*

Yes, I know it's just a fantasy.  
The world could never change  
so radically overnight.  
But imagine.

-Lynn Ungar 3/20/20

