

Report to the UUTC Board  
Rev. Bob Renjilian  
April 2022

PERSONAL:

- I enjoyed the chance to sing in competition with the Barbershop Chorus at the regional event in SC. Christy had come to visit and got to see that, and then we took a couple extra days to retrace some of our honeymoon trip. It was good to have Christy down here in April more than usual, and some of you got to see her working on clean-up day and attending Easter services. It makes a big difference in my life!

REFLECTION ON “NEXT NORMAL”

Due to the current lull in COVID-19 cases the cost of tests continues to decline. Of course this may reverse if we get another variant wave, but for now this is good for us. The most recent batch of tests for the choir cost just under \$6/person. The older brand was costing about \$10/person (so we’re now getting five tests for the old cost of three). We have continued use of tests for choir on Sundays, and offered them on the rehearsal night following Easter as well (due to a 9:00 congregant later tested positive). Please note that the choir members do not have the option of distancing and choosing a place apart from others, nor can they slip in at the last minute and leave immediately (as some of our COVID-cautious members do), and I think it is appropriate to continue buying tests as a level of reassurance (not for the congregation, but for our talented volunteers).

The mask-optional change makes it possible for folks to enjoy Coffee Hour again, and I observe, with rejoicing, there has been high energy and good socializing during that time. I’m getting to see the congregation appear that I was told about pre-pandemic!

Higher attendance is bringing higher CO2 readings, and we still need to clear the room between services to start from scratch again, but the exchange units are still making an air-quality difference.

ADULT RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION:

I met with the newly expanded ARE group during part of team meeting night. They are working to bring back Wednesday night food and presentations that fit ARE subjects. We’re hoping to have Rev. Ernie Mills at the kick-off on June 1!

We have only a handful more sessions of the “Poetry and Meditation” class that I lead two Wednesdays per month.

RK Young and I met with Bruce Kirkman to start planning registration for the UUTC congregational retreat at The Mountain (to be held September 9-11 - Friday dinner through Sunday lunch). I hope that all leaders will put this on their calendars, and we hope to attract some new faces as well. Besides the fun of being together, I will be leading a visioning/Appreciative Inquiry session at one point during our days there.

#### PASTORAL CARE:

I have made phone calls, been available to talk with members, and met with LHHH. We are trying to include reminders of folks who remain in need of our prayers, both in the Sunday prayers and in the Member-to-Member connection emails. LHHH volunteers brought Easter gift bags to many members who don't get out much.

#### WORSHIP:

It was wonderful to see so many Jr. High School students recognized as completing OWL on April 24 as part of worship.

I've been consulting with Vanessa Cowie, John Austin, and the Worship Team to bring new changes to the typical service format. I believe this is leading to a better flow, and higher energy. I did hear one concern after the first two Sundays of this change: that by having the hymns at the start and the end there is too much sitting in between. Each shift will have such give and take.

The April Soul Matters theme of “Awakening” was particularly upbeat, which helped as we welcomed more people back who were away for two years.

The Worship Team discussed the experiment of going to a single service for the Summer, starting in the later part of June, and through Labor Day Sunday. Choir was surveyed and responded positively. In the meantime we will continue to experiment with what can be done between services time, such as the Egg Hunt and Communion Service on Easter, the Pronouns workshop I led on April 24, and looking ahead to May with the congregational meeting between services, and the May Soul Matters discussion being between rather than after the late service.

#### OTHER MEETINGS:

The Pledge Drive team finished their work, and I am grateful for all Kristin and the team accomplished!

Team meeting night added Social Action Team in April. That gave me the chance to be present to the two teams I'm primary for (ARE and Social Action), and check in as the Facilities meeting was ending.

I was happy to participate in the interviews which led to the hiring of Kristin Porter. Thank you to RK and Gail for organizing these, and shepherding the process.

I attended (on line) the Brevard Council meeting where our Institutional Campus zoning was approved. Many thanks for RK being in-person present to answer a question that came up.

#### WIDER UU MOVEMENT:

I am meeting this week with the Unitarian Universalist Association Religious Education Credentialing Committee (on Zoom) as we review about a dozen DRE's who are seeking credential status. Each professional who comes before the committee has completed courses, essays, projects and gathered references, background checks and plenty of other paperwork. That is a lot of work and dedication... and a lot of background reading for me and the other committee members. I am very glad to have a guest in the pulpit the Sunday morning in the midst of all this. I am energized by the work, but also zoomed-out! I am glad to be of service to the wider movement.

I have registered as a virtual (off-site) UUA General Assembly participant. I will be glad to serve as a ministerial delegate (my credential does not take away from your other available delegate slots).

#### "CANdemic" REFLECTIONS ON THE HEALTH OF CONGREGATIONS:

During a pledge drive meeting there was a concern raised as feedback from someone in the congregation wondering if UUTC was doing ok, was the money and membership strong, etc.? I like to think of this congregation as above average, and I've been led to believe you have a long history of reaching your pledge goals.\* We did really well this year with a super majority of folks holding strong in their pledges after recent years of increases, or increasing this year. The average contribution per member is up. As summarized by Kristin Leesment, the total raised was running about the same as 2020 (the year people increased to bring on the new minister). We did not increase over last year, and your budget planning will be tight, but let me share with you a comparison with the wider UUA movement that I forwarded to the committee so that you have this in perspective:

Official Certification records at the UUA show that overall (total), Unitarian Universalist congregations report a loss of about 10,000 members during the pandemic from Feb. 2020 to Feb. 2022 (most recent figures), and that pledges are down by \$1.62million over those same two years. We swim in the same waters as all of them, but are doing comparatively better. I also found evangelical church consultants predicting 2022

reductions in giving, and mainline churches talking about consolidating congregations due to tanking membership crisis that affects them. UUTC is above average, and I commend the dedication and generosity of all who are making that true and real! Keep it up!

\*Ernie Mills has since told me that's not always true. I've been having coffee-shop conversations with him to see about increasing his participation at UUTC, and we also chatted about this topic.

TRIANGULATION (how to avoid it):

Another other part of healthy congregations is when people are free to articulate what works or does not work for them, and go directly to the person(s) they need to say it to. Some of the Worship Service adjustments are an example of that - members voicing ideas to me, directly, so that I might lead in ways that respond to the greater good (on my own, and with the Worship Team which is a wonderful resource).

If you, as a leader at UUTC, hear from anyone that they have something (or someone) troubling them, ask them if you can help empower them to speak directly to the person(s). Or offer to go with them if they are shy. Or find other ways that don't make you the go-between. I'm a good listener for example, but find it hard to get a clear idea of what is being conveyed if it is already once-or-twice removed from the source.

COMING UP:

May 4 - UCC and UUA training on responses to anti-LGBTQ initiatives (Kevin and I are registered for this Zoom).

May 5 & 7 Budget Discussion Forums (I will attend the Saturday session).

May 14 - NAACP breakfast, I have RSVP'd

June 1 - "Wonderful Wednesday" ARE kickoff planned