

Report to the UUTC Board
Rev. Bob Renjilian
February 2022

PERSONAL:

- I am grateful for the chance to visit Christy in Pennsylvania on President's Day weekend. I am thankful that Rev. Ernie Mills was wanting a chance to preach and that this worked for both of us! Christy is already planning her visit down here in March, and her sisters will come at the same time for a visit (their first time to our home).
- I had fun delivering a few "Singing Valentines" this year, with a Barbershop Quartet.
- My health continues to be good.

REFLECTION ON "NEXT NORMAL"

I made contact tracing calls in February, after we learned a congregant later got COVID symptoms (without symptoms on Sunday, Feb. 13, but sick by Tuesday). I'm glad I wasn't preparing a service that week, as it took a while to reach the approximately 55 people. To my knowledge, no one caught it at church.

I continue to shop for COVID-19 tests for the choir, and I think we have enough on hand for March Sundays.

With the quick decline of Omicron cases, it seems prudent to re-assess some of our restrictions to adjust for current trends. I have authorized the experiment of flexible mask on/off during a fundraiser to have food and drink (which means folks will have masks off if they eat). This experiment is during the (limited attendance) Pi-day mid-March. Projections are for continued decline of cases through then.

I am also consulting the COVID/Reopening Task Force folks for their reactions to my proposal that at this point in the CANdemic we could bring back congregational singing in March. I believe masks help us stay fairly safe, as we've found during contact tracing over the past months (even during Delta and Omicron) - so I'm not looking to change our mask mandate.

ADULT RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION:

I led the Soul Matters discussion group via Zoom in January. Again there was very low turnout, but very worthwhile engagement.

I also led more sessions of the "Poetry and Meditation" class. We had four registered students, but one missed a couple sessions due to illness and decided to drop.

I'll offer a "Pronouns Workshop" in the coming weeks (still setting calendar), for helping us be more skilled in understanding those among us who may be revealing a gender identity different from before.

COMMUNITY SERVICE:

I was asked to estimate the amount of time I'm engaged in the Brevard / Transylvania County community. I was depressed when I realized I'm probably averaging just over 2% of my time in that way. This is far lower than my pre-COVID "normal." But to date I've not been to an Interfaith leaders gathering (has there even been one during COVID?!), for example. I like to put down roots, get to immerse myself in a community, and thought we were getting there until Omicron. This low level of engagement does not feel good.

PASTORAL CARE:

I have made phone calls, been available to talk with members, and met with LHHH. I met with about a dozen UUs at College Walk at our February meeting. I worked on a tricky pastoral situation, and drew upon the ministerial discretionary funds as needed.

I organized a meeting of the Grief Group as Omicron was on the downhill slide, and now turning it over to Sharon Gublo to determine how the group will proceed from here. I was grateful to Ann Rabb and Sharon Gublo for attending that February meeting so this could transition. I can be called back in if needed, and of course am available for individual pastoral care for grieving members.

WORSHIP:

I'm getting the sense at Worship Team meetings that feedback is showing a discontent with the way things have been during this next normal. Perhaps this is a wonderful indication that people are feeling done with their COVID fears and want to envision evolving religious services as we pull ahead! We're not going to do 2019 again, as I'm a different minister and we're still in the CANdemic, but I do believe the next normal will bring some familiar and some new worship possibilities to Sundays. A quote from the UU Ministers Institute at the beginning of this month seems to fit the collaboration and visioning ahead:

"Now is the time to unleash our collective imaginations to till the soil, nourish the seeds of change with our aspirations, and bolster fledgling shoots promising new possibilities with ageless wisdoms, compassion, and courage. Not because we're certain that our labors will bear a harvest, but because we know that it is only through daily acts of loving and serving with and for each other that we live into our boundless, sacred humanity. Constant gardeners we must be, ever preparing the earth for full and abundant life." - Sandra Bass, excerpted from *Endangered Species, Enduring Values: An Anthology of San Francisco Area Writers and Artists of Color*, edited by Shizue Seigel, Pease Press, 2018.
www.peasepress.com)

OTHER MEETINGS:

I have coordinated with John Austin on live music for Sunday services, and with Janice Canon for recorded Sundays. I've coordinated with Vanessa Cowie, worship team, AV crew, and worship associates as well.

Leader meetings: I met by phone with Bart Renner, in person and electronically with RK Young and also Staff meetings. I have checked in with Kevin by email or other modes of communication. I met with Social Action leadership and any other group leaders as needed. I work with Kristin Leesment and the Pledge Drive team.

WIDER UU MOVEMENT:

I met again with a subgroup of the Unitarian Universalist Association Religious Education Credentialing Committee (on Zoom) as we envision how to improve our anti-racism initiatives. I also met with the group preparing questions for the candidates in the program during their credential progress review. COVID changed our plans for the spring review: we will be gathering online-only this spring to help RE professionals reach their credential goals, so I will not be traveling out of state as originally planned.

I also attended the UU Ministers Association Institute. The workshops were very much in tune with the continued UUA emphasis on moving forward on Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and multiculturalism (AR/AO/MC). In particular I was in the track about collaborative leadership. Though I'm not finding Zoom meetings as engaging as live ones, we still managed some good participatory engagement. I've included one quote above in the WORSHIP section, and here is another I saved:

“People often misread Ella Baker’s declaration that “strong people don’t need strong leaders” as a statement against leadership. Instead, she was cautioning movements against valorizing single charismatic leaders, especially ones not grounded in or accountable to communities. She understood that transformative change requires the leadership of many people. The wisdom was shared in a time when individual Black men were seen—by media and national decision-makers—as the most essential leaders in the civil rights movement. Baker saw the failures of building around personalities and individual leaders instead of building around the needs of the people and developing many leaders to move the work forward.”

-Charlene Carruthers, founding national director of BYP100 (Black Youth Project 100), *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*, published by Beacon Press in 2018 (Beacon Press is under the auspices of the UUA)

This also makes sense in congregations growing through the Pastoral-to-Program size transition. The minister can not be the central leader, and must be grounded and accountable - and the other leadership teams are essential to the transformative change. I am grateful to RK Young’s attention to the low volunteerism on our ministry teams, as they will be essential to us pulling out of COVID, and into the vision of our UUTC mission as we grow.