

Annual Report from the Minister

for the Unitarian Universalists of Southern Delaware

respectfully submitted by Rev. Heather Rion Starr
written in May, 2022

This has been a marvelous first year with you. As I have reminded myself and all of us multiple times, it has been my primary goal this first year to get to know as many of you personally as I possibly can. My deep gratitude goes out to all of you for your warm welcome back in May 2021--of both my family *and* me, and your continued support all throughout the summer and fall as we have arrived and settled in here in southern Delaware. Adjusting to a new Minister's schedule and style is a transition for any congregation, and you all have received me with warmth, patience, flexibility and understanding, for which I am hugely grateful. Settling in with me as your Minister has meant, among other things, adjusting to my commitment to take Mondays off and my trying to limit evening meetings whenever possible so that I might be present with my family.

The March 27 Installation was a particular highlight of this year. All the work that went into that celebration, the beautiful Orders of Service, the many out-of-town guests, the Choir returning to the Choir risers to sing, the wonderful reception--together, we marked this significant moment in the journey of this congregation and affirmed our covenant with one another. I encourage you to keep your Installation Order of Service near-at-hand (and if you need a copy, let me know, I have plenty)--because that celebration brought together so much of what we all want to lift up more of at UUSD: joy, playfulness, wisdom, community, collaboration, this congregation's unique story and context, nourishment, energy, music, creativity, determination, and perseverance!

Just as I have been working to get to know you personally, I have also worked this year to try to understand the particular culture of this congregation. In a typical month, I attend the bi-monthly Board meetings, Executive Team meetings (typically 2 mornings/month), meetings of the Social & Environmental Justice Committee, the Human Resources Committee, a staff Benefits Tune-up subgroup, Finance Committee, the Pledge Campaign Team, Adult & Children/Youth Faith Exploration Committees, Worship Committee, Membership Committee, the Pastoral Care Team, 8th Principle Task Force, the Committee on Congregational Life (CCL), the Hybrid Church Task Force, the newly-formed Safer Congregation Team, and Covenant Group and Church Council meetings as they occur. I have also tried to sit-in on Property Management and Expansion Committee meetings when I am able. Additionally, I would include in the Pastoral Care vein my many meetings with individuals and couples regarding preparing memorial services and weddings, and many wonderful get-to-know-each-other-individually conversations with newercomers and those considering UUSD membership.

Supporting our part-time, dedicated, and remarkably capable UUSD staff has been a meaningful part of this first year with you--I strive to meet weekly with Office Administrator Nancy Cordes and Director of Music Ministries Julie Keefer. Through a coincidence of timing and

circumstance, I have also supervised Julie's Field Placement here at UUSD this year as she pursues her Masters in Divinity from Chicago Theological Seminary; being her supervisor in these dual roles has enriched our conversations greatly, and I look forward to seeing how her development as a Minister herself continues in the months and years ahead.

Connecting with my Unitarian Universalist colleagues is crucial for sustaining this work. I meet monthly with the Priestley-Kingsbury UU Ministers Association Chapter, with my long-time Online Clergy Cluster for Remote Ministers (which connects me with colleagues in Canada and across the country), and this spring I have been engaging in monthly Coaching sessions with a UU mentor/Coach via Zoom.

Overall I seem my primary areas of focus at UUSD as being: **worship preparation & leadership, pastoral care, staff support, and supporting congregational maturation.** Obviously this last area is a bit of an umbrella category and can include many things, so here are some examples from this past year:

The Executive Team recommended, and the Board agreed to establish, a Safer Congregation Team. That Safer Congregation Team has now convened and has begun going through the many existing UUSD documents related to Building Use, Emergency Response, Working with Children & Youth, and more, and begun our effort to update and "harmonize" these many documents and practices within the congregation for the betterment of all.

Other examples of "supporting congregational maturation" include identifying the Bylaws as a place that needs review. There are multiple Bylaws that seem either dated or more reflective of a smaller, family-sized congregation. Clarifying and updating our Bylaws can help the whole congregation function more smoothly. The Board has established a Governance Review Committee and I look forward to working with that Committee in the months and year ahead.

We will need to hire a new Office Administrator as Nancy Cordes prepares to move and retire in the fall. Planning ahead for the hire of a Director of Faith Exploration for Children & Youth (to start, potentially, in July 2023) is also just beginning, and this will be a crucial step in terms of investing in and stabilizing our energetic Faith Exploration program.

As we move towards the UUA Regional Staff-led Leadership Workshop this weekend, I am hopeful that we continue to bring clarity to what each entity in this congregation is and isn't responsible for. There are countless exciting endeavors this congregation could take on in the years ahead; how do we focus and prioritize our efforts? Who needs to be involved in order for something to truly be a communal effort and come to fruition?

This congregation's Mission is to: **Nurture spiritual growth, Embrace diversity, Work for justice, and Strive for a loving world.** How are we keeping that Mission at the forefront of all our decision-making about what comes next and how we go about it? I know this will be a

guiding question for me as we make our way forward, together. It is a joy to be co-creating community with you, and I thank you all for your dedication, generosity, warmth, invitation into your homes and lives, and your continued engagement and support.